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TEACHER STUDY GROUP: A CASE STUDY IN AN ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the experiences of participants in a teacher study group at the elementary school over a two-year period. The practitioner-researcher, who was also the assistant principal of the school, was both participant and observer in the process.

To study the impact of the study group on the participants' personal and professional growth, qualitative research methodology was used. Data sources included transcriptions from eight monthly transcriptions the first year and four quarterly ones from the second year, personal reflective journaling, freewrites, informal conversations, and personal interviews.

Three major themes emerged from the data: the influence of the study group on teacher socialization and professional growth, the dilemmas of creating study groups within a school, and the impact of the study group on school change.

While this research examined the positive effects of the teacher study group as an alternative form of professional development, it also raised many issues which warrant further exploration as other schools adapt this concept of professional development to their specific contexts. As an insider-outsider practitioner-researcher, this dissertation accomplished two things. First, it explored the kind of professional development which evolves from teacher-generated talk and personal stories. Second, it attempted a small change in a bureaucratic system with the sharing of power for planning staff development between administration and faculty. Hopefully, more research in this area will be conducted.

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Do the opinions and ideas of teachers matter? Should teachers be perceived and treated as professionals who are intellectuals? Or should they be regarded as “factory workers” on the assembly line, mindlessly adhering to routine duties as ordered by their supervisors? What happens when teachers are provided time to have professional conversations on a regular basis as a formalized part of the workday?

This research describes and analyzes the development and culture of a teacher study group in an elementary school at which I was the Assistant Principal. As a participant/observer and practitioner-researcher, I examined the evolution of a teacher study group and its impact upon both the teacher/participants and the school as a whole. I looked for insights into a non-traditional professional development program that incorporated teachers' experiences and ideas, rather than the more traditional program, which primarily legitimizes the knowledge of outside experts, administrators, or consultants.

A growing number of researchers suggest that traditional teacher in-service programs using consultants or others external to the school are often ineffective (Joyce & Showers, 1987; Wilson & Berne, 1998). Although Smylie (1989 as cited in Wilson & Berne, 1998) found that teachers considered their experience in the classroom to be of most value in their learning, few studies of teacher learning through practice have been conducted.

As an alternative to traditional professional development, Wilson proposes “action research, in which teachers document and analyze their own experiences”

(Wilson, 1998). He describes the most effective professional development model as one that includes follow-up activities, long-term support, coaching in the classroom, and ongoing collegial interactions. There is general recognition that teachers lack a voice in educational change. It is recognized that emotions, as well as intellect, are part of the change process. Group support has been identified as contributing positively toward educational change (Montgomery, 1995).

Lashway (1998) notes that the rhetoric for learning organizations is easy to find; thoughtful research is much harder. He cites Leithwood's (1995 as cited in Lashway) assertion that "we have almost no systematic evidence describing the conditions which foster and inhibit such learning." Boice (1991), states, "The literature reveals very little about how educators learn to be educators or how they develop and change their practices" (cited in Cranton, 1994, p. 213).

This case study provides an in-depth and detailed description and analysis of the experiences and interactions of teachers as they participated in creating a study group for professional development. It focuses on a school-based teacher study group in a large, statewide school district. The group members used reflection, professional literature, and conversation to promote personal and professional development. Furthermore, the study explores the relationship and involvement of the school's administrators on the evolution and development of the study group.

#### Background: Rationale for the Study

As an educator for over 30 years, I have experienced our statewide school system from various perspectives and levels - first as a classroom teacher, then as

a district resource teacher, and finally as assistant principal in a large elementary school. Along the way I have been disturbed by many questions

As a classroom teacher, feeling constrained and isolated, I asked: "Why are teachers so isolated from one another? When do we have a voice, and about what? Why are we treated like factory workers, expected merely to follow orders from the top bureaucracy? If our thinking is not valued within the organization, why did we even have to attend college?" It often seemed that a high school education was more than adequate for one to read teachers' guides and top-down directives.

As a resource teacher, liberated from the four walls of the classroom, I thought: "How wonderful to have access to all the research studies! How wonderful to have time to think and talk with other educators! How wonderful to be able to share knowledge and to network! Why don't *all* teachers have the same wonderful professional opportunities as part of their workday?"

As an assistant principal, experiencing the system from another level of power, I observed: Teachers were taking directives from us, who got them from the district office, who in turn got them from the state office, who in turn got them from the business community, the state government, and the national government. I saw school administration, of which I was a part, largely handling operations and threats of litigation. The whole district typically looked outward for guidance and knowledge - from business, from the mainland, from "experts." The talent and expertise of people within the system did not seem a viable source of knowledge.

As a result of these questions, feelings, and observations, I concluded that good teaching, the sum of many years of experience, is too often trapped in the four walls of the classroom. How, I wondered, do we tap this rich resource and help build the culture of the school? Can teachers be empowered to use their wealth of knowledge? In what ways can administrators be part of the empowerment? These personal questions gave impetus to my decision to break through the four-walled cells within our school and access the rich experiences of our teachers through the beginning of a teacher study group.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and to explore the possibilities of professional development within the context of a teacher study group. It was also to document the issues which impact the evolution of such a group and school change.

In this study, two efforts were made to break through the barriers of time, teacher isolation, and lack of experience with reflection to provide an alternative form of professional development. The first effort was with a teacher study group of nine participants, teacher representatives from each grade level or department, within the elementary school. The second effort was with articulation times, or professional talk times on Wednesday afternoons, at each grade level group in which the nine study group participants served as facilitators.

These efforts were driven by the belief that schools need to nurture the personal and professional growth of teachers, that teachers need to see themselves as learners, and that teachers are the central figures in educational change.

## Introduction to a Theoretical Perspective

As I reviewed the literature, I found that I was far from alone with my struggling inquiries. A number of researchers support the need for this inquiry. One of the most vocal is Giroux (1988) who declared that educational reforms generally ignore teachers and “display little confidence in the ability of public school teachers to provide intellectual and moral leadership for our nation's youth....Where teachers do enter the debate, they are the object of educational reforms that reduce them to the status of high-level technicians carrying out dictates and objectives decided by experts far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life” (p. 121). His sad conclusion is that teachers do not count in educational reform.

In addition to Giroux, many others likewise see the need for teachers to be central to educational reform (Fullan 1993; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Coulter, 1999). As early as the 1960s, curriculum theorists Schwab and Stenhouse “recognized the need for teachers to be central to the curriculum exercise as doers, making judgments based on their knowledge and experience and the demands of practical situations” (Carr, 1986, p. 18).

Teachers, on the front line, are working closest to the students they serve. If they are to improve instruction and to increase student achievement, it would seem essential that the system nurture and encourage, rather than direct and dictate, the intellectual lives of teachers. Teacher collaboration produces results like “positive and long-lasting change because such activities provide the basis for transformative learning...lifelong, inquiry-based collegial process rooted in the development of schools as collaborative workplaces” (U.S. DOE, 1999, p. 45).

According to Fullan (1993), "it is only by individuals taking action to alter their own environments that there is any chance for deep change" (p. 40). Like Goodlad (1994), Fullan laments the lack of *continuous learning* for teachers. Fullan calls for teachers to be *active learners* and *reflective practitioners* (Schon, 1987 as cited in Goodlad, 1994). Fullan further quotes Sarason as saying that "as long as educators see themselves as lacking the power to change anything in a meaningful way - waiting for Godot for salvation, from others somewhere in an uncomprehending world - they will remain part of the problem" (cited in Fullan, 1993, p. 120).

As in my own personal experience as an educator, the literature shows that the rhetoric is strong, but the reality contrasts glaringly. Reflective teaching is not a regular part of the professional practice. Goodlad (1984) cited teacher-to-teacher links in collaborative assistance as practically nonexistent. Goodlad has worked towards a systemic collaborative inquiry between the universities and school districts for school renewal. He suggests that the emotional drain of a teacher's regular duties in the school day is too onerous to allow time for reflection. Smith and Scott (1990) support that reality with the isolation teachers experience in the profession. "In most elementary schools teachers seldom have an opportunity to exchange more than a few pleasantries with their colleagues during the course of the working day" (p. 9).

Such a situation of teacher isolation exists because historically, teacher's work has been perceived as happening only when teachers are performing direct instruction to a relatively large group of students. If teachers are not in a classroom with students, they are generally not considered *working*. The best

value for tax dollars is conventionally thought to be only when teachers are spending time in direct contact with students.

While it seems that schools often borrow from business and industry in their attempts at organization and management, they have not adopted the research and development component. There is little regard for preparation time, much less reflective, or “think” time. The National Governors' Association's report, *Time for Results* (1991), notes that “schools typically spend about one-tenth what private industry devotes to development of personnel” (p. 63). A recent *Honolulu Advertiser* article similarly says:

On average, private industry spends about 30 cents on the dollar for technology training and development. Schools spend closer to three cents...Networking is the lifeblood of most professions. Without opportunities to make new contacts or exchange ideas, most people are unable to realize the potential of their jobs. Why should teaching be different (Goldstone et al, 2001)?

The disparity between what industry and education pay for professional development may be an indication of some of education's woes.

Roper and Hoffman (1986 as cited in Smith & Scott, 1990) point to the core of the problem: "Convincing the powers that be that teachers are professionals who learn best from one another is the central issue...districts will often pay the price for the legitimacy of expensive 'expert' rather than put those resources into using their own staff as experts" (p. 63). The price paid for overlooking teachers as experts has been great. Educational reforms, one after the other, have failed because of what Fullan calls the "intensification" waves -

times of top-down monitoring of the *what* and *how* of teaching. He proposes enhancing the roles of teachers in instruction and decision-making so that educational reforms might meet with better success (Fullan, 1991).

Over a span of three decades, I have seen reforms come and go. I have both experienced and witnessed the isolation of teachers and the need for relevant professional development that originates from within.

As both an advocate for teachers and an arm of the administration, I see both the rich resources within teachers trapped inside of isolated classrooms and the administrative challenge of promoting reflection and improved classroom practices. I have witnessed firsthand the daily demands that have multiplied over the years on both faculty and administration. Caught in the web of operations, expediency, crises, and top-down reforms, I found myself, in spite of my passion for making sense of curriculum, becoming one of Giroux's (1988) "high-level technicians." If, as busy technicians, we as school administration and faculty have no time for networking, sharing, and reflection, how can we be the change agents in education? How can we be the ones to examine best practices? How can we be the ones to critically address student achievement? And if not us, then who?

Educators - school administration and faculty - must be the key agents driving the change. While politicians, business persons, and the general public certainly have a critical stake in the quality of education in the United States, they are not central actors in the day-to-day action of school life.

This paradigm shift is not without difficulties - the difficulties of the current system conflicting with innovation and the need for learning to be part of a teacher's regular work day (Little, 1993). The devotion teachers have toward



being in the classroom with their students, their propensity towards following orders without question, their classroom isolation are all challenges to this new conception of professional development. Although professional development is gaining prominence in school reform efforts and there are many forms of it, there are few studies with details on cost and effect (Dilworth & Imig, 1995).

Teachers are in the midst of many state, district, and school directives and participate in many planned professional development programs. Their involvement varies in degrees. Will they embrace this opportunity to set their own agenda for professional conversations and initiate their professional development? Will they be willing and able to break the walls of isolation? Will they trust the creation of a teacher-empowered group? Will administration be able to tolerate the ambiguity and uncertainty in which the group will evolve? This subset of questions is embedded in the main research questions.

This case study documents the 1) evolution of a teacher study group within an elementary school and 2) the unfolding of its efforts to make their experience that of the total school. It also documents these events through the lens of an assistant principal's insider-outsider view. It captures snapshots of some of the complexities in school reform and raises questions for continuing inquiry.

### Questions Guiding the Study

In this case study I, as a Participant-Observer and Practitioner-Researcher, explored the complex interrelationships among personal history, perceptions of self and the profession, the bridging of theory and practice, and the role of power relationships. The questions guiding the study were:

1. What are the possibilities of having teachers in my school engage in professional conversations about instructional improvement? Would the teachers value professional conversation? Would teachers commit to this study group or find it an infringement upon their personal and professional time?

2. How would we be able to find the time to form a teacher study group? Would the teachers commit time to the study group or find it too much of an infringement upon their personal and professional time? Would they even value this time, and if so, would we be able to work through the challenges for finding time for such professional conversations for the entire faculty? Would they see the significance of professional conversation enough to want it as part of their professional work and time?

3. What happens when teachers have a professional conversation in a study group? How will the group evolve? What will be the group members' understanding of their experiences?

4. What will be some of the teachers' reflections as they share collegiality and address classroom practices? What will be some of the common themes?

5. How will I view my dual role as researcher-administrator in a teacher study group? What are the implications of a study group for teacher-student interactions and administration-faculty relationships?

6. What will be the challenges of using a study group as a form of professional development? What are the implications for personal and professional growth through this non-traditional form of professional development?

## Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I discusses the background of the study, its purpose, the theoretical framework used in the study and the research questions. Chapter II presents a review of related literature. Chapter III discusses the use of qualitative methodology, provides details about the site, the participants, the duration of time, and the qualitative design. Chapter IV discusses the findings of the study. Chapter V is a discussion to make sense of all that happened and to present the complex questions this study raised.

## CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review is organized into four primary sections. The first section introduces literature on the theoretical basis for the teacher study group. The second section presents trends in professional development including recent work with teacher study groups. The third examines what the obstacles are to professional conversation for teachers. Finally, the fourth section explores the issues of power differential.

### Vygotskian Theory

The theory underlying the creation of teacher study groups in this study is the sociocultural theory. This theory seeks to explain how knowledge is constructed and asserts that learning is social. It is based on the works of a Russian psychologist, Lev Semyonovitch Vygotsky (1896-1934). Vygotsky analyzed these social processes in dyads and small groups (Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993).

Vygotsky's (Vygotsky 1978; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000) sociocultural framework contains the following major themes:

1) Learning is social. The children develop through their senses and interaction with others; they depend on people who are more experienced. Meaning is first experienced between and amongst people in a group, or interpsychologically, before it is internalized intrapsychologically. Vygotsky referred to this process as the process of internalization.

Leont'ev (1981) emphasized that internalization is not the mere transferal of mental activity; it is the mental process itself. "The process of internalization is not the transferal of an external activity to a preexisting internal

‘plane of consciousness’: it is the process in which this plane is formed” (Wertsch & Stone, 1985, p. 163 as cited in John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 197).

2) Through what means does one learn from social contact?

Vygotsky (1978) suggests this occurs through semiotic mediation - tools which include language, music symbols, math symbols, the paintbrush, the computer, calendars, symbol systems, sign language, and Braille. All of these tools are “products of sociocultural evolution in which individuals have access by being actively engaged in the practices of their communities” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 193). Wertsch (1994) calls semiotic mediation the “carriers of sociocultural patterns and knowledge” (p. 204 as cited in John-Steiner & Mahn).

Semiotic mediation is a bridge between the external and internal worlds - the social and the individual worlds - of a child. It is language used to negotiate, clarify, question, define, and make meaning. Vygotsky argued that the internal speech or dialogue, however, is not just a copy of the external speech; internalization occurs. There is an “emergent nature of mind in activity” (Cole, 1996 as cited in John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky (1978) saw the mind in a constant state of change.

There is discussion, negotiation, and collaboration between teacher and student in the co-construction of knowledge. The interaction is not a mere transmittal of knowledge but of “transaction and transformation” (Chang-Wells & Wells, 1993, p. 59 as cited in John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 197).

3) Vygotsky applied these concepts to instruction through a third concept, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD, according to Vygotsky, is “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined

by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). It is in this zone that semiotic mediation can be used to help raise a child’s actual developmental level to his potential one. This co-construction of knowledge process is called “scaffolding” (Bruner, 1978 as cited in Bayer, 1990).

In summary, developmental functions exist between people in a social, or interpsychological plane, then within a person on an intrapsychological plane where knowledge is internalized or transformed through a connection with a person’s prior knowledge. Vygotsky analyzed these social processes in dyads and small groups (Forman, 1993, p. 343).

#### *Application of Vygotsky’s Ideas*

In the interpsychological process, the learner is in an apprentice position learning from an expert. The learning, however, is two-way in a dyad or small group. The dyad or small group collaborates to construct knowledge through interaction and through building on prior knowledge. The process is called scaffolding, a term coined by Bruner (1978 as cited in Bayer, 1990). Scaffolding is “guided participation in joint activities that help students assimilate new ideas” (Bayer, 1990, p. 8).

In like manner, teachers do not grow professionally through a mere transmittal of information about teaching strategies; they use their prior knowledge and co-construct knowledge on an interpsychological level with instructors, students, texts, and colleagues. How teachers make meaning from classroom socialization forms their philosophy. Interactive oral discussions and

writing reflect the internalization process. Catalysts to internalization included “exposure to Vygotskian theory, other carefully selected readings, practical strategies, and reflective writing; and interactive discussions that allowed them to question and challenge their perspectives” (Ball 2000, p. 244). Finally, the collaboration that leads to internalization leads to teachers developing their own voices and philosophies.

### *The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for Teachers*

Teachers seem to attend colleges of education, read texts, take notes, and then proceed to the classroom thinking that they are armed with the necessary epistemological capital to survive in the classroom. The culture shock for most is devastating, and nearly 50 percent of teachers leave the field in the first six years (Thomas & Kiley, 1994 as cited in Greene, 1997). For those who remain, some are fortunate to learn from more experienced others, or mentors, and move through the ZPD to their greater potential. Those less fortunate learn as best they can doing the best they can. In any case, all are locked within the four walls of their classroom for the next 30 years or so. Given the daily bell schedule and the increasing demands on teacher time, teachers rarely discuss instructional practices and share innovation or challenges. Even less often discussed, if awareness even exists, is the research on educational practices and issues. No wonder then that the classroom today is not much different from decades ago. The organizational culture of being self-contained and safe within the four walls of one’s domain remains strong.

If, however, as Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) say, teachers are central to any kind of educational reform, a ZPD needs to be created to move teachers from

their actual development level to their potential level of development. Rather than being *technicians* (Giroux, 1988) following guidebooks and doing what they are told, teachers need time to connect directives with their prior knowledge (Ball, 1994, 1996 as cited in Wilson & Berne, 1998). They need time to examine the assumptions being made by others and themselves (Brookfield, 1995); they need to learn from each other; they need to scaffold and to internalize some of the solutions to their inquiries.

Bayer (1990) has developed a collaborative apprenticeship learning model, which applies Vygotskian philosophy to discussions. She delineated four principles derived from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to guide her university teaching; they are equally instructive for adult learning with teachers in a study group. The principles are:

- 1) Learners are actively attempting to make sense out of their world, using their background knowledge as a frame of reference from which to generate hypotheses.

- 2) Working in collaboration with an instructor and peers within an apprenticeship process, learners construct knowledge beyond what they could do independently (ZPD).

- 3) Language is used as a tool for learning.

- 4) Students develop language and thinking competencies by using these processes regularly for meaningful problem-solving tasks (p.20).

Bayer's description of teachers giving lectures and having students work alone on classroom assignments parallels the professional development of teachers themselves. Thus, her remedy for students is just as applicable for



teachers' professional development. She suggests small groups with peer interaction for problem solving. She suggests Vygotsky's semiotic mediation, the use of language for interaction, for problem- solving, clarifying, analyzing, synthesizing, speculating, and evaluating different points of view (Bayer, 1990). It is through such forms of semiotic mediation that internalization, or transformation, of new concepts connected to prior knowledge can occur.

To move through the ZPD, one needs to have assistance from a more experienced other. Bayer thus suggests heterogeneous peer groups. Such a heterogeneous group would definitely be beneficial for a teacher study group in which teachers may learn from each other. When each can be both an expert and a learner, the egalitarian group will have a better chance to succeed and survive. It is important for teachers to see themselves as capable of constructing knowledge and to see themselves as able to scaffold through the ZPD. Teaching is good only when it "awakens and rouses to life those functions which are in a stage of maturing, which lie in the ZPD" (Vygotsky, 1956, p. 278 as cited in Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). Teacher development can include input from more knowledgeable teacher educators, readings, discussions, collegial interactions, and reflective journal writings (Ball, 2000). Whatever the resources, the emphasis is on giving assistance within the ZPD for professional growth.

Teachers work in isolation (Griffin, 1985; Jackson, 1968; Knoblock & Goldstein, 1971; Sarason, 1971 as cited in Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). Gallimore and Tharp (1990) attribute the problem of achieving school reform to this very isolation of teachers. They contend that traditional teacher training provides cognitive structuring, but that teachers need "new repertoires of complex social

behavior” to progress through the ZPD. They identify modeling and feedback as indispensable means for professional growth and abandonment of the idea “that students are supposed to learn on their own” (p. 201).

The Goodmans profess the same phenomenon in their whole language program when teachers support student learning by being “initiators, kid watchers, liberators, and professional mediators” (Goodman & Goodman, 1990). Moll and Greenberg (1990) created the ZPD for teacher development. They are careful to note, however, that they “refrained from imposing a curriculum on teachers; that is a recipe for failure. Instead, we worked collaboratively with teachers and built on their needs or interests” (p. 345).

Necessary for a breakthrough of the isolation which teachers experience is the recognition that learning is social, that teachers need to talk with each other, and that as humans we learn from one another. Talking is a way of learning. Group learning and discussions need to be valued; teachers need to value their own knowledge and experiences enough to share with others. To connect to our prior knowledge, reflective writing is especially useful in the form of journals. The need for diversity in a heterogeneous group also suggests that teacher study groups would benefit from cross-grade level teachers in a small group. Au (1990) notes how novice teachers value opportunities to discuss problems in their professional growth.

Joint activities, shared learning and meanings, and professional growth are possible outcomes from a teacher study group. However, as Tudge (1990) notes, “there is no guarantee that the meaning that is created when two peers interact will be at a higher level, even if one child is more competent than another and is

providing information within the less competent peer's zone of proximal development" (p. 169). He suggests attention to the "processes of interaction themselves" (p. 169). Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen (2000) allude to this same conclusion in their research on *Idiocultural Diversity in Small Groups*. Their groups did not work equally well. What seemed lacking in the group, which abused the process, was a set of ground rules and an instrument for self-evaluation.

Establishing a teacher study group does not guarantee that meaningful semiotic mediation and transformative internalization will occur. However, a teacher study group provides a forum in which such internalization is more likely to occur. (Ball, 2000, p. 229). Such a form of professional development holds much promise for movement towards a teacher's voice grounded in questioning, clarification, mutual respect, and commitment towards growth from an actual development level to a potential one in the ZPD.

Teachers having professional conversation in a study group allows them to live out the Vygotskian principles of building upon prior knowledge, learning from each other as sometimes expert and sometimes apprentice, and gaining independence at ever higher levels of growth.

### Framework of Adult Learning

Current issues in the field of adult learning directly impact my work with teachers in a teacher study group. With the empowerment of teachers, principals are thrust into a role more of support than control (Murphy, 1991). As part of the support role, principals are pressured to become curriculum leaders. As their

role expands to curriculum leader, principals will need “to develop a better understanding of adult development and learning and of strategies and techniques for working with adults” (Murphy, in press; Rallis, 1990 as cited in Murphy, 1991, p. 27).

Knowles (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) defined andragogy as adult learning with the key components being diagnosis, objectives, learner experiences, evaluation. However, they distinguished adult learning as the learner being involved as a partner in the process and sometimes the major designer of the learning activities. They used Pratt’s model (p.38) showing four learning situations depending upon learner needs. Two are teacher-directed situations: 1) Dependency on the teacher is high when the learner needs both direction and emotional support; 2) Dependency on the teacher is still high, but lessens when the learner has the confidence and just lacks direction. The other two are learner-directed situations: 1) Learner is self-directed, but needs more self-confidence; and 2) Learner is self-directed and reasonably responsible for his/her own learning.

Assessing which Pratt situation a learner is in helps the teacher design the curriculum. This model seems to coincide with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development which first determines the learner’s present situation. The Pratt Model, however, does not seem to show the movement in the Zone from the learner’s actual level of development to a potential, or independent situation. As the learner’s abilities are determined, assistance can be given in the Zone to the proximal development - the level at which the learner is able to reach performance with assistance. As the learner internalizes what he/she has learned,

he/she will be able to perform independently of the teacher, thus being more learner-directed.

There is no single theory of adult learning. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) provide a tripartite framework of three components: 1) the adult learner 2) the learning process and 3) the context in which learning takes place.

### *The Adult Learner*

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) cite Knowles (1968) who first addressed adult learning as distinctive. Knowles asserted that adult learners have a wealth of prior experiential resources with which to make meaning of new knowledge. They are generally self-motivated and responsibly direct their own learning. Their focus is on immediacy and problem solving; motivation is more intrinsic than extrinsic.

In contrast to Knowles, Brookfield (as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) argues that such characteristics may be neither true nor unique to adults. He also contests the advantage of the quantity of experiences, as some negative experiences may act as barriers to learning.

Cranton (1994) extends adult learning to transformative learning, a learning which occurs when old assumptions are examined and revised. She asserts that informal dialogue among colleagues about their practice is integral to transformative learning. She theorizes that the informality of the discussions would help break the isolation of practitioners and be potentially a powerful way to engage in self-reflection.

### *The Learning Process*

What happens exactly in the learning process? Merriam and Caffarella (1999), drawing upon works from Mezirow and Freire, focus on the process as a life-changing transformation. They identify three key concepts of this process: 1) experience, 2) critical reflection, and 3) personal development.

1) Experiences are important links to learning. One of Vygotsky's main principles in the Zone of Proximal Development is linking new knowledge to prior experiences. In this sense, Vygotsky's internalization might well be equated to Merriam's definition of transformation; a change occurs in the learner. Shared experiences, such as those in my study group, also provide for a common foundation upon which to build understanding and collaboration.

2) Critical reflection is making sense of our experiences. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) call Brookfield the most notable adult educator of critical reflection. Brookfield (1995) advocates critical examination of one's basic assumptions and beliefs. Reflection, he contends, is not critical unless it leads to action and change. He feels that teachers have the opportunity to "transform the possibilities people see in their lives" (p. 209). Teachers who experience democracy with a sharing of power in their profession will more likely demonstrate the same with their students.

Brookfield (1995) champions change, for example, in giving voice to those (like teachers) once silent. He delineates the changes that accompany critical reflection in teaching:

- a) Realizing the ideological basis to teaching.
- b) Minimizing risk/damage through political skill. An

interesting tactic Brookfield proposes is that of accumulating deviance credits, brownie points of active participation in school, so that one's voice is heard even when in an oppositional stance.

c) Continuous evolving/learning.

2) Teaching and transforming to connective activity. Teachers must adjust their teaching in accordance with how students are experiencing learning. In Vygotskian terms, this would be scaffolding. They need to check the understanding of the learner and the connections he is making. Brookfield recommends checks like journals, critical incident responses, life histories, and discussions, similar to Vygotsky's semiotic tools of mediation.

3) Personal Development starts with experiences and critically reflecting upon those experiences. Such reflection brings about transformation, changes that enhance growth. Adult learning which results in changes in perspective promote personal development.

### *The Context of Learning*

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) recognize the influence of political, social, and economic contexts upon the learner. This is not unlike Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in that the external processes affect the internal. Learning is affected by the meaning we make of cultural diversity, class, gender, and race. Within the context of a school, the organizational culture, the hidden curriculum, the unspoken, the silencing of voices play a part in how adults see themselves and regard learning.

## Professional Development Trends in Education

A teacher study group is an alternative to formal, traditional professional development programs. Currently in teacher education, the Vygotskian theory undergirds the growing recognition of the need for teachers to find their voices and have professional conversations. In the Zone of Proximal Development, the less experienced benefit from those more experienced. For teachers, there can be professional growth through the interaction with peers, readings, discussions, and reflective journal writings (Lee, 2000).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) are strong proponents for much more teacher involvement in teacher professional development. They envision professional development in which teachers do collaborative inquiry, are empowered to improve practice and build a community of sharing. In their 1999 meta-analysis, they reviewed the previous twenty years of professional development. They elaborated on the basic three types of teacher learning: 1) from formal knowledge generated from university-based researchers; 2) from expert teachers in practice; and 3) from experience in the classroom simultaneously with studies of the formally generated knowledge.

The key in Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) third type of professional development is that all participants in these groups - whether beginning teachers, experienced teachers, teacher educators, or facilitators - function as fellow learners and researchers rather than experts. Although consultants and outside speakers as well as wide readings from multiple perspectives are often used as resources, the underlying conception is quite different from the idea of studying the experts.



Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) further state that "the goal is understanding, articulating, and ultimately altering practice and social relationships in order to bring about fundamental change in classrooms, schools, districts, programs, and professional organizations" (p. 279). They affirm that one of the striking new ways for generating knowledge of practice is teachers engaged in oral inquiry. "Studying practice through oral inquiry is based on rich conversations about students' work, teachers' classroom observations and reflections, curriculum materials and practices, and classroom and school-related documents and artifacts" (p. 279). Although the data sources are primarily oral, the group records comprise the written documentation.

The kind of talk created in such teacher groups is often a self-critical attempt to make sense of teachers' daily work. As teachers see themselves as learners, they are more able to link their own learning to that of their students' learning (Branscombe, Goswami, & Schwartz, 1992 as cited in Cochran-Smith, 1999). Teachers in learning communities definitely affect the school culture and teaching. Hargreaves (1994), in fact, sees learning communities as a precursor for educational change. These learning communities differ in substance from workshops in which teachers are being "trained." (To be "trained" would mean using what Freire calls the "banking" concept of education in which predetermined knowledge is deposited into the minds of participants.) Teachers do not just assist in carrying out predetermined ends; they examine the purposes and underlying assumptions of educational change efforts.

Several recent studies have examined factors which contribute to successful professional development programs and are outlined here.

### *Renyi*

Renyi (1996) in the National Educational Association's (NEA's) publication on professional development concluded the following:

- 1) Professional development must be continuous.
- 2) It needs to be part of the teachers' daily and yearly time frame.
- 3) Teachers need more control and responsibility for their own professional development.

### *West Ed*

The U.S. Department of Education's West Ed Report supported some of the NEA findings (Killon, 2000). It identified the common success factors among the eight exemplary schools that won the National Awards Program for Model Professional Development in 1996-97 and 1997-98. The identifying feature in all the schools was that the school culture was a culture of learning. One of the success factors identified was ongoing, job-embedded informal learning: Teachers in exemplary schools had opportunities for collaboration and conversation about teaching and learning. Furthermore, there were formal learning opportunities provided in teacher study groups or teacher research projects.

A second common factor was the breaking down of isolation walls and the building of a community of practice. Teachers taught each other. Each felt valued; all voices were heard. The principal participated as a learner, too.

Third, the exemplary schools found the time, both in and out of the school day for school improvement. Though teachers may talk in committees or in casual moments, scheduling meeting times ensured professional conversations. Different ways to find time included using support personnel, substitutes, release

days, and special funding. For example, at one intermediate school, teachers obtained a weekly three-hour block of time by grouping their resources of music, art, and physical education.

Fourth, the exemplary schools kept as their focus the effect their actions were having on their students. They used multiple assessment data.

#### *Apex Team - Nolan's Study*

Not all attempts at improving professional development have been equally successful. Nolan and Meister (2000), under an endowment from a private school committed to disadvantaged children in the Mid-Atlantic states, studied educational change as it affected teachers.

Nolan and Meister studied the Apex Team, a collaborative group of five secondary teachers. They did a qualitative study in response to calls from researchers like Hargreaves and Fullan for understanding the phenomenon of educational change. They agreed that educational change must address the needs and concerns of teachers. They sought to give an in-depth view of the emotions which teachers experience in the process of educational change.

The Apex team worked together to develop a central theme for their disadvantaged students as the school was working towards restructuring the curriculum. The educational changes being proposed from the central office were teaming, interdisciplinary teaching, and block scheduling (Nolan & Meister, 2000).

Nolan and Meister (2000) described the teacher perceptions which emerged as "uncertainty; intensification and limited time; lack of administrative leadership; content loyalty versus team allegiance; and craft pride, caring, and

moral purpose." Teachers felt "abandoned and helpless, unprepared to create an interdisciplinary curriculum that would naturally fit all five subject areas" (p. 204). Although the intent seemed to have been teacher collaboration, the educational changes were being mandated by the central office to the teachers without enough consideration to a shared understanding and teacher voice.

In spite of the Apex team's difficulties, Nolan and Meister (2000) did not conclude that the change process had failed. The Apex team had impacted the students positively with newly created curriculum, and the teachers had developed some collegiality amongst themselves.

The emotional and mental fatigue, however, had been enormous. Nolan and Meister subsequently discovered that the central office administrator quite understood the teachers' difficulties, but that his understanding was "inert and sterile" and lacked the "depth of emotional turmoil and mental stress" the teachers had experienced (Nolan & Meister, 2000, p. 223). Nolan and Meister's description of the grueling process of change called for more sensitivity to "the daily lives of teachers and their commitments, understandings, hopes, and fears" (p. 223).

Nolan and Meister (2000) ended their study with the observation that Sarason (1971 as cited in Nolan & Meister, 2000) believed that schools will be better for children when they are better for teachers. Sarason's (1990) words to that effect have been quite emphatic through the years. He declares that it is invalid to assume that schools primarily exist for the children's growth and development. If conditions for productive development do not exist for teachers, teachers will be unable to create such conditions for their children.

## Teacher Study Groups

Concurrently with my research, recent literature on study groups as an alternative form of professional development, has appeared. The following are some examples and their distinctive features.

### *Short's Teacher Study Groups*

Wanting to understand the power of study groups, Short, Birchak, Connor, Crawford, Kahn, Kaser, and Turner (1998) proposed study groups as a form of professional development in the Tucson District. Their study groups consisted of school-based teachers who looked to Short, as a teacher educator, to facilitate ongoing learning on educational issues that concerned them. Short worked with other teachers to collect the study group data from Tucson school groups like the Warren teachers over a period of at least seven years.

Short et al. (1998) began their groups without a specific agenda. The agenda was for professional growth and evolved from the group. For example, the focus of the Warren study group changed from year to year. The first year focused on literature-based curriculum, and the second year on portfolios. The third year centered on cultural issues, and the fourth year on organizing study groups as part of the school structure. The fifth year's interest was on socialization and the book, *Life in a Crowded Place*. The sixth year was a step back with a new principal on board; the teachers had to initiate the structure again. The seventh year restarted with a small group on the book, *Learning Together through Inquiry*, by Short et al.

Short et al. (1998) also worked with teachers in a neighboring Maldonado study group that had branched off from the Warren group after the first year.

They focused on building community the second year, the new math program the third year, multi-age teaching the fourth year, the library the fifth year, and the creation of several study groups the sixth and seventh years.

Through experiences with the above schools and other study groups, Short and a group of teachers detail the why, what, and how of study groups. They conclude that study groups, not dependent on external or bureaucratic support for maintenance, are uniquely able to foster synergistic collaboration and to access the expertise of teachers.

#### *Murphy's Whole-Faculty Study Groups*

Murphy and Lick (1998) worked with 100 schools and 1,000 whole-faculty study groups in those schools. Study group purposes are guided by the needs of the school as determined by the total faculty, not individual interests or needs. Whole-faculty study groups differ from independent study groups in that they are an integral part of the school and district. The approach works with the total school, first with the teachers looking at the school's action plan and then identifying the initiatives most critical to them individually. Study groups of about five members each are then formed around the critical initiatives. Each certified faculty member is in one of about eleven groups. The groups meet one hour a week, with hired substitute teachers taking their classes during the school day. They also meet after school at faculty meetings.

#### *Beatty*

Beatty (1999) conducted a five-month study of eight secondary teachers from different disciplines and different secondary schools. The participants volunteered for the study and met in a private setting once a month for three to

five hours at a time. The study "examined the extent to which self-directed professional learning, personal and shared reflection, and authentic collaboration within a supportive study group could create changes in secondary teachers' perceptions of themselves and their work and catalyze professional growth" (p. 1).

This study was undertaken to seek an alternative to the lack of success of existing professional development. The results were positive in the midst of continued top-down professional development models. Beatty concluded that participants felt more in control in their classroom and more motivated on the job. He also noted the group's positive response to the group process and was affirmed by their meeting an additional year beyond the research period. Participants felt the group helped to overcome some of the isolation, loneliness, and lack of appreciation they felt. The study's findings support the development and implementation of collaborative study groups. The group helps to integrate the personal, professional, and organizational life of participants. The study called for exploring the impact of an administrator, something the study did not do.

#### *Staff Development (SD) 2000*

Staff Development 2000 (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, K., 2001) was an 18-month, grant-funded initiative to examine the study group process and the experiences of facilitation. It spanned 25 districts in southeast Michigan and included three tiers of participants:

- 1) The design team included the project director, the facilitator, and the evaluator.

2) Twelve educators (6 classroom teachers, 2 lead teachers from the district, 2 technology specialists, 1 administrator, 1 professional development consultant).

3) Educators in nine study groups, each facilitated by participants from the second tier.

The second tier participants, who met two nights a month, formed and met as a study group so that they would be better able to facilitate their own. They focused on facilitation issues and the challenges they faced. They struggled with time as a major issue. They met after school and into the evenings.

Outcomes of the study included professional confidence and commitment to continuous learning, power of relationships and energy within the group, more responsibility for self as learner, the application of learning to participants in varied professional roles, and growth in personal lives.

#### Obstacles to Moving from Theory to Practice

Despite support for teacher collaboration and reflection in the literature, their existence is rare in Hawaii and in the nation. This leads to the question of why this kind of professional development is not being implemented. The literature suggests that there are at least three primary obstacles that prevent the theory of teacher collaboration and reflection from existing in actual practice. They are time, teacher isolation, and lack of opportunity/experience with reflection.

#### *The Need for Time*

The lack of time has been one of greatest hindrances to finding time within the teacher's workday for professional development (Little, 1993).



According to the 1999 Executive Summary compiled by a joint commission of the State of Hawaii and the Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA), one of the seven factors found to impact teacher morale negatively was teacher overload.

The report states:

Teachers report being exhausted by their duties and professional functions. Mandates to attend more meetings, document everything, supervise extra-curricular activities and to provide for an increasingly diverse student population impact teacher morale in a negative way. Teachers say, "We don't have time to do the things teachers are asked to do and then we are told to do more with less" (HSTA, 1999, p. 3).

Uninterrupted time for teaching is rare. Programs that pull children out of class and various resource programs break up the day's schedule. This fragmentation of time "dramatically reduces the time available for core instruction" (Rettig, 1995, p. 6). It also makes finding one common collaboration time for grade level teachers very difficult.

Other countries have been more successful in finding the time for teacher collaboration. In Japan, China, and Germany teachers do have the time. Teachers teach half the day only. The other half is allocated for other professional duties. Every day there are opportunities for teachers to learn from each other (Stevenson, as cited in Fullan, 1993, p. 134).

In contrast, Goodlad (1984) notes that the realities of the American school are not conducive to professional growth. He says with clarity:

Is it realistic to expect teachers to teach enthusiastically hour after hour, day after day, sensitively diagnosing and remedying learning difficulties? During each of these hours, according to Jackson, teachers make 200 or more decisions. During each day of the week, many secondary teachers meet hour after hour with successive classes of as many as 35 students each. As one teacher said to me recently, "It is the sheer emotional drain of interacting with 173 students each day that wears me down" (p. 194).

Smith and Scott (1990) also recognize the teachers' overload of responsibilities. One would expect that a profession dedicated to learning would be structured in such a way that its members could learn from one another. In this light, the isolation of teachers from other adults is a glaring anomaly. In most elementary schools teachers seldom have an opportunity to exchange more than a few pleasantries with their colleagues during the course of the working day. Even the lunch break—for most professionals a time to socialize with their coworkers—is for most elementary teachers a time to supervise children in the lunchroom or on the playground.

They further recognize that a specified time within the school day is necessary for teachers to collaborate. "It is both unfair and unrealistic to expect teachers to somehow find the time for collaborative activities and continue to do everything they are expected to do already" (p. 62).

Other educators are aware of the time dilemma. They recognize that increased costs will occur, but warn that maintaining the present system is not

cost effective. They consider time for teacher learning an investment of major importance to a school system and its educational programs (Wildman & Niles, 1987 as cited in Smith and Scott, 1990; Little, 1986). The Center for Economic Cooperation and Development (1998) concludes in its report that teachers need time for reflection, communication and development.

Scheetz and Benson (1994, p. 30) in their guide *Structuring Schools for Success* state, "Because any quality effort to pursue professional growth and improvement takes time, it is recommended that considerations be made for time available to teachers for such pursuits."

Smith and Scott (1990) discuss ways in which some districts absorbed the costs of time for teachers and how unions and principals were part of the change process. Although this is indeed a very important part of making teacher study groups a reality, the cost and politics of implementing them are difficult obstacles.

The National Education Commission on Time and Learning Report (1994), noted other challenges to finding time for teachers. A common one was that teachers resist the time being taken away from their contact with students. The authors of the report deplored the use of substitutes or taking away instructional time which, they felt, was already too limited. The community viewed teachers as working only when they were physically with their students. Such strong challenges have resulted in little change (NEC, 1994).

According to Roper and Hoffman (1986 as cited in Smith & Scott, 1990), however, the root problem may extend beyond finding the time. It may be the bureaucracy being unwilling to give the time to teachers:

Convincing the powers that be that teachers are professionals who learn best from one another is the central issue...districts will often pay the price for the legitimacy of the expensive "expert" rather than put those resources into using their own staff as experts. Lack of time is a symptom, not a cause, for the more basic problem of lack of support for collegiality (p. 63).

Abdal-Haqq (1996) seems to agree that "the most formidable challenge to institutionalizing effective professional development time may be the prevailing school culture, which generally considers a teacher's proper place during school hours to be in front of a class and which isolates teachers from one another and discourages collaborative work" (p. 3). In spite of the expected challenges to the school culture, Abdal-Haqq suggests five ways time can be created for teacher development:

- 1) Use support staff to free teachers on early release days.
- 2) Lengthen 4 days and free up the fifth day for early release.
- 3) Reform content of regular staff meetings to reflect curriculum concerns.
- 4) Schedule common planning periods.
- 5) Establish substitute bank of 30-40 days per year.

#### *Teacher Isolation*

The second obstacle to collaborative professional development is teacher isolation perpetuated by lack of support for collegiality (Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Goodlad, 1984; Rosenholtz, 1985; Lortie, 1975; Flinder, 1988 as cited in Smith & Scott, 1990). A typical teacher spends 80% to 90% of the school day in direct contact with students. The remainder of the time, which includes recesses, lunch

and preparation time are often taken up with individual student help, parent contacts, and other immediate responsibilities (Hoerr, 1996).

The difficulty is convincing all "that the isolation of teachers in their classrooms and the top-down management philosophy that ignores teachers' expertise are short-changing both those who work in schools and those who are taught there" (Smith & Scott, 1990, p. 69).

How a teacher starts out in his/her career seems to greatly affect openness to staff development in ensuing years. Little (1986, p. 494) says, "by and large, novices are left to become teachers on their own." Evaluation from the administration is looked upon as more to "correct incompetence, rather than to foster competence." The result is an adversarial relationship and a goal to be left even more alone, pushing teachers into further isolation away from support and recognition.

Rosenholtz (1985) considers isolation the greatest impediment to learning, forcing teachers to rely on their own resources, usually their own school days (cited in Smith & Scott, 1990).

Barth (1986) supports this idea saying that the profession's very survival depends upon teachers sharing their knowledge base (cited in Smith & Scott, 1990).

In the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics' report on Teacher Quality, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin state there is a "call to reconceptualize the practice of teaching" (p. 32). The report emphasizes the need for formal professional development and collaboration with other teachers.

Flinders (1988 as cited in Smith & Scott, 1990)) found that teachers usually rejected collegial interactions in order to preserve time for quality instruction. Ironically, this very isolation undermines quality education. McDonald (1992) says that “we need only have the courage...reflect on our practice, converse with our peers, look critically at the circumstances of our work, and, finally, attend to the voices of experience” (p. 123).

Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) state that it takes several years of working together intensively before teachers are able to work collaboratively and continuously on improving teaching strategies. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) reiterate the same need for genuine intellectual exchange.

They further emphasize the need for teacher research done within the school day. They recognize, however, that some of teacher isolation is self-imposed. It provides for privacy and offers a way to conceal one's failures (Little, 1987 as cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

#### *Lack of experience/opportunity with reflection*

Finally, one of the greatest barriers to collaborative professional development is the lack of experience and opportunity with reflection. Typically, as in the narrative of an in-service teacher (Olson & Craig, 2000), the school culture does not include time and space for reflection. Teachers are so spun in a web of action that they do not take the time for reflection. “Dewey (1938) points out that when we act without reflection, we act on other people's purposes instead of developing our own purposes” (cited in Short et al., 1998). So, it is in the lives of teachers who have not generally experienced reflection as part of teaching.

Marsick and Watkins (1992) explain that the workplace in general has traditionally not been conducive either physically or psychologically for continuous learning or reflective practice. To unlearn the old and learn anew may leave one feeling vulnerable. To question and challenge beliefs can feel uncomfortable and be looked upon as threatening. Those who have traditionally been in a passive role may find it foreign to adopt a proactive one.

Furthermore, Marsick and Watkins (1992) suggest that the reflective practice is not like a neatly, planned package. It is not like class instruction with a clear beginning, middle and end. The facilitator is not teaching a class; his role of support is not clearly delineated.

Finally, Marsick and Watkins (1992) state that bureaucracies within organizations often impede this kind of empowerment and informal learning. Teachers suffer from similar psychological and work impediments. In order to be considered competent, teachers assume that they must be self-sufficient, and independent. "Asking questions and being uncertain are inappropriate behaviors... Teachers are not encouraged to talk about classroom failures, ask critical questions, or openly express frustrations ... the occupational culture perpetuates the myth that good teachers rarely have questions that they cannot answer" (Lortie, 1975 as cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p.87).

The lack of reflection time for teachers may also be due to teachers themselves rejecting empowerment. First, they may not trust the power given; they may fear that it is a ploy to involve them only in minimal and unimportant ways. Second, lack of resources and support are discouraging. From the

administrator's perspective, there may be fear of the loss of power (Blase & Blase, 2001).

### Power Differential

Power is a factor which impacts the forming of study groups. First, there is the issue of power differential, difference in status, in so far as who has the knowledge. The power to do research and/or question research, has historically been the guarded, traditional domain of men. Second, teacher empowerment challenges the hierarchy of power and poses a threat to the bureaucratic system. Third, these first two issues of power differential impact the power differential between teacher and student as will be exemplified below.

#### *The Power Differential of Knowledge*

The power differential of knowledge seems to be a paramount concern in effecting educational change. Traditionally, research has been the isolated domain of academics who look upon classroom teachers as "subjects" and who have generally not consulted the teachers with the process or results of their research.

Teachers, confined to classrooms and struggling with the daily, practical decisions of education, have not concerned themselves with research findings. They are affected by them only remotely as bureaucratic directives on programs and approaches, purportedly based on current research, are mandated. Teachers in the last century have not been credited with or afforded much of a mental life. Even today teachers are being programmed by legislation, litigation, and administrative expertise. The "outsiders" do not consider the importance of what teachers themselves can contribute.



Kemmis (1982) categorizes the history of educational research into four phases. The first began with philosophers such as Rousseau and Dewey who developed educational theory about practice. In the second phase, an optimistic one, researchers used scientific methods to analyze the problem and to make improvements. The third, a pessimistic period, existed when bureaucrats viewed theory as irrelevant to practice. Researchers were viewed as too distant from the real life of the classroom to be taken seriously. The fourth and present phase recognizes that the practitioner involvement is necessary. This type of educational research exists in a collaborative relationship with the classroom teachers (cited in Oja, 1989).

The literature affirms Kemmis' fourth phase of recognizing knowledge for teaching derived from teachers' own inquiries. Teachers are beginning to have the authority to know and to construct knowledge (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986 as cited in Cochran-Smith, & Lytle, 1993).

The "thought-feeling" connection, which seems vital to the empowerment of a group, is prized by feminists. Unless there is a connection between thought and feeling, a connection disregarded by traditionally male-dominated research, there is a "power dynamic" (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 31) of researcher expert in a male role dominating the consumers in a female role. Traditional research had the power of unquestioned knowledge. Inquiry in a constructivist setting "begins with researchers drawing upon their own experience" (Kincheloe, p.31). The private is made public.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986 as cited in Oja, 1989) in their study recognized women's difficulty in gaining a voice. It seems that the

time has come for women/teachers (and the majority of elementary school teachers have been women), to progress from being a knower through silence and received knowledge to being a knower through constructed knowledge. "The control of teaching and curricula was strongly influenced by a set of gender dynamics between women and men that continue to this day" (Apple, 1986 as cited in Eisner, 1990, p.32).

The landscape of research is changing and it is no longer the isolated domain of "educational researchers in academic journals or educational conferences. The findings are important understandings for teachers who are contemplating ways of improving their everyday professional practice" (Eisner, p. 32).

A very present dilemma exists - "how to reconcile the idea of co-construction of knowledge by teachers and their students with the current move toward increasingly specified curriculum frameworks, how to hold on to the larger goals of democratic education the fact of intense pressure to evaluate success based on students' performance on high stakes tests, and how to support communities of teachers working together on the questions that matter to them in light of mandates at many levels to collaborate on the implementation of system policies" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

### *The Power Differential of Administration*

Fullan (1993) contends that change occurs in spite of us, but that how we respond is crucial and that the individual is the key to a systemic change. It is essential for the principal (Fullan, 1997), as well as the teacher, to be in a continuous state of learning. This continuous state of learning evolves, and not

everyone will be at the same stage simultaneously (Hall & Hord, 1987 as cited in McLaughlin & Hye, 2001).

McLaughlin and Hyle's (2001) study emphasized the principal as the agent of change, but called for more study on how the principals "specifically promote reflective practice with teachers" (p. 38). They note the lack of literature which focuses on the individual as part of the change process. They note the need for case studies to examine contextually how change occurs (Fullan, 1998 as cited in McLaughlin & Hyle). Their study exemplified how a change in principalship gave powerful impetus to change.

Ideally, principals as co-learners with teachers in a study group can be beneficial. The ideal, however, may not be achieved at the start of the process. Short et al. (1998, p.113) recognizes that because principals "have a great deal of power within schools," teachers might feel intimidated. The role of a principal in enacting change is essential. However, the principal's participation in the initial stages of a teacher study group is not always advised. Short recommends a "zone of safety" defined by Lipka and McCarty (1994 as cited in Short et al.) as an environment of support, openness, and risk-taking. To ensure this environment, one needs to weigh the impact of the inclusion of one with positional power over the other members.

Short et al. (1998) reports that "even when teachers trusted and respected their principal, the principal's presence did initially have a negative influence on teachers' willingness to share about difficult issues" (p. 113). The degree of participation seemed to have depended upon the participant's relationship with the principal. It also seemed that should the principal introduce an agenda focus,

he/she would dominate; participants would subsequently restrain themselves from more active participation.

As a result, in some of Short's study groups, principals were voluntarily or involuntarily excluded from the group. In some cases the exclusion was only temporary. As the group bonded, and members were more comfortable with each other, the principal was sometimes invited.

The presence or absence of the principal is crucial when it affects the "zone of safety" (Lipka & McCarty, 1994 as cited in Short et al., 1998, p. 114). For a study group to be empowering, the participants must be able to freely discuss their beliefs and classroom practices. A participant in a position of power, such as an administrator, may or may not hamper such a feeling of freedom and safety. The key seems to be a safety zone that allows for vulnerability and growing trust.

Jones (1997) studied a teacher group on Multiple Intelligences that succeeded in shifting power away from "experts" who dispensed knowledge top-down to a collegial group sharing and improving classroom practices. The voice of the facilitator, a fellow teacher, blended in as a more equal voice with the others.

The power differential with the principal, however, was never resolved. The principal in this case ostensibly shared power, but really "saw herself as removed from her staff rather than a democratic leader" (Jones, 1997, p. 19). At the end of the study group year, the principal reverted to the traditional principal role, citing her mistake in giving "teachers too much power in the operation of...." As a result the study group found it necessary to continue their existence outside of the official staff development program and met off campus. They have

continued their own growth as teachers and in their unofficial status, exerted some influence over staff. Their relationship with administration, however, is uneasy and an obstacle toward collaborative staff development (Jones).

Action Research on Change in Schools (ARCS), a team in New Hampshire, provides some data on power differential between the leader (not the principal, in this case) and participants of a study group (Oja, 1989). The leader, Jack, was a part-time teacher and part-time administrator. Some in the group distrusted him and wanted to know where his loyalties lay. At the same time, the group deferred to him and looked upon him as the leader, since he had insider information on the new principal. His power lessened as the group focused upon research, an area with which Jack was unfamiliar.

The university researcher on the ARCS team played a directive role in the beginning, but gradually worked her way toward a more facilitative one. She set the agenda at first, but then passed that responsibility on to the team. She redirected individual questions to the team as a whole. Participants in the ARCS project judged the worth of it by the degree of their involvement, contributions, and degree of leadership.

The differential power between administration and teachers is discussed in other studies, although not necessarily with study group situations. In Alabama, teachers who felt more empowered in their decision-making "gave the principal power because of their personal belief in the administrator's good-will" (Short et al., 1998). When a high school principal capitalized upon teacher expertise and influence to effect instructional improvement, the result was teacher

empowerment and collegiality (Keedy & Finch, 1994). While on one hand, teacher empowerment improved teacher-administrator relations, it also caused principals to fear losing power (Irwin, 1990).

A resulting force of teacher empowerment could be the reshaping of the role of the principal. In a study of five school districts, Pittsburgh, Rochester, Louisville (Jefferson County), Cincinnati, and Miami-Dade County, researchers examined the role of the principal. The study concluded that principals face change, ambiguity, and new challenges as a result of increasing societal demands. Amidst the mixed messages principals receive about their jobs, it is clear that a new part of their job description is now the ability to allow for highly collaborative decision-making. The study also concluded that in order for principals to embrace teacher professionalism, they themselves must feel empowered and must exercise more leadership than power (King & Kerchner, 1991).

In summary, Fullan (1997) declares the principal's role and influence as paramount in the success of educational reform. He emphasizes the need for the principal to be a perpetual learner. "This means access to new ideas and situations, active experimentation, examination of analogous and dissimilar organizations, reflective practice, collegial learning, coaching in relation to practice and more" (Schon, 1987 as cited Fullan, 1997, p. 46).

Successful educational change, Fullan (1997) says, may originate with the principal, but the sharing of power is critical from that point forward. First, critical to the sharing of power is the creation of groups for different tasks. Peer interactions within the groups provide the pressure and support needed for task

completion. Second, teacher empowerment means the provision of time, money, and personnel. The principal's key role is in creatively finding time; even if it is just a little, the time and resources, when released regularly, pay dividends.

Third, important to this process is diversity, conflict, and resistance.

Heterogeneity/diversity prevents boredom and promotes creativity. Fullan says conflict is a necessity, but must be handled well for productive solutions.

Resistance is expected and welcomed. To build trust, one must actively listen for understanding and for new possibilities.

### *The Power Differential between Teacher and Students*

Narrowing the power differential between administration and faculty has the potential effect of narrowing the power differential between teacher and students. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) share the story of Samona Joe, an African-American woman in Philadelphia, who reflected upon her student teaching year and raised questions of power in her sixth grade classroom. She wondered about how race, class, and gender affect reading ability groups and how teacher decisions are reflections of societal expectations. She questioned whether student self-perceptions are not in fact built upon "teacher expectations, evaluations, and other ability-based groups" (p. 292).

Because movement from one group to the next is limited, the child's power over his own success is also limited. Samona helped her students, most of them also African-American and poor, to examine issues of power. She also helped them to retell their stories in Standard English, ostensibly to empower them with expanded communication skills. Samona discovered from her students that power is equated with knowledge, being smart. Unfortunately, they considered

this power an innate one, and considered themselves thus powerless. She considers one of her own greatest powers as the way she judges herself, her students and the job she does.

Samona opposed the power of standardized tests to predetermine the fate of students. "If we recognize that learning is a complex, dynamic process which may be manifested in many different ways, then we should allow and insist that assessment be open to such manifestations" (p. 295). She supported the use of portfolios which gave her a more comprehensive and empowering assessment for her students. Students, she maintained, need to know that the teacher has no special powers with knowledge. Knowledge is acquired by "having information, cognitive strategies, and skills in your head" (p. 298).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) recognize the emancipatory nature of teacher inquiry. They moreover recognize as the larger goal "to create classrooms and schools where rich learning opportunities increase students' life chances and to alter the cultures of teaching by altering the relations of power in schools and universities" (p. 18).

It seems that power differential in all areas must be shared in order for teacher empowerment to be in fact realized. Such were the findings at Bank Street College (Cohen, 1993). The College assisted two urban junior high schools in New York City to effect school reform. In essence, Bank Street formed teacher study groups and provided additional meeting times "to discuss teaching, change, and innovation." They identified six patterns of change that emerged:

- 1) School leadership is committed to teacher empowerment.
- 2) Student membership in the school is important.



- 3) Voluntary teacher membership is essential.
- 4) Attention to professional growth is necessary.
- 5) Successful teams became colleagues.
- 6) Even when there is real empowerment, it may not have immediate credibility.

### Summary

A theme throughout the literature is the need for teachers to engage in professional talk, for teachers to value their own experiences, for teachers to reflect upon their own lives and experiences, and for teachers to focus on matters pertaining to instructional improvement. Clair (1998, p. 498) organized teacher study groups to improve classroom practices in English as Second Language classes and noted that "Teacher study groups hold promise, but more examples are needed." She asserts that there is both a need for more practice with this process and a need for more conversation about it. This dissertation research is an attempt to contribute to that knowledge base with a case study at one elementary school.

### CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine and explore the experiences of teachers within an elementary school as they experience a teacher study group as a form of professional development.

Wolcott (2001) suggests relegating this chapter to perhaps an appendix and faults researchers with too much defensive verbiage about how qualitative studies are generally done. While I have devoted a whole chapter to method, I will heed Wolcott's words and be sure to focus in this chapter only on what is relevant to my research.

#### Research Design

This is a qualitative study done in the school at which I was the assistant principal the first year and then retired during the second year. There were nine participants in the teacher study group which I facilitated. Each participant in turn served as the facilitator for his/her respective grade level or department.

#### *The Duration of the Study Groups*

In 1997-98 I informally brainstormed the idea of a teacher study group with individual teachers. The following year 1998-99 I went on sabbatical and explored that topic further with my university professors. When I subsequently returned in 1999-2000 to serve out my last year as assistant principal at Green Valley Elementary, I began my study.

The teacher study group sessions were conducted over a period of two years. There were eight monthly sessions in the first year, 1999-2000 and four quarterly sessions in the second year, 2000-2001.

The first year's sessions, except for the last which was held at

school, were held at local restaurants. I was the facilitator for all but one session. My one absence was due to a personal emergency. Sessions the first year were held mainly on Saturday mornings for about two to three hours. Attendance the first year was usually near the 100% mark. The participants attended all the sessions except for the teacher who missed the sessions in the month of May because of childbirth.

The second year's sessions were held at school usually at the end of a professional development day. Because of competing responsibilities, attendance was poor, closer to the 50% mark that year. The December meeting held on the night of the Christmas program was attended in fact by only two participants, Rita and Marian. The teachers were not as free as they had thought; they were involved in the preparation of the children, as well as the clean up.

#### *The Site - Description of the School*

Green Valley Elementary is the school at which I was the Assistant Principal. This research formally began during my fifth and last year as Assistant Principal of the school. I retired at the end of that year, but continued the research for one more year. Both the principal and the faculty supported this research, so gaining access was not a problem. I was both the insider, as a participant with the faculty members, and an outsider, as the Researcher/Facilitator. It is because of this emic-etic, or insider-outsider perspective that uniquely positioned me to do this practitioner research.

Research participants needed to agree to the research and process, and signed a Human Subjects form. In ethnographic research, typically a "gatekeeper," or someone with insider status, connects the researcher to those

being researched (Creswell, 1998, p. 117). In this practitioner research, I gained early access and established my own rapport with the participants. I was able at different times and points of contact to explain the research study and gain support for it.

Green Valley Elementary School is located on the island of Oahu with a faculty of about 50 teachers serving a population of about 850 students. At the time of the study the teachers had a combined total of one of the highest number of years of experience among the state's public schools and were thus a very stable faculty. Many had begun their teaching careers at the school and stayed on for the duration. Some even began with their student teaching semester there. Through the years, the older generation of teachers has monitored, formally or informally, the younger ones. There is a sense of family, as many have had their own children, now adults, attend the school on geographical exceptions. In fact, there are presently at least three teachers who have their son or daughter also teaching at the school.

This school is a high-achieving one and has made the Superintendent's Honor Roll for Stanford Achievement Test scores. Parents outside of the area yearly seek geographical exception to the school. The school community is mixed with about 85% being military and 15% being local of mainly Filipino, Hawaiian, Chinese, and Caucasian mixed ancestry. Their mixed ethnicities are reflected in some of the most beautiful children's faces in Hawaii. The teachers are mainly Japanese-American. A small percentage are Chinese-American, Cosmopolitan, Filipino, or Caucasian.

In spite of this rather congenial setting, teachers are still traditionally isolated. Classes are basically self-contained. Some grade levels see each other at 30-minute lunch times in the lounge; others do not. After school times are usually hectic times used for parent conferences, tutoring, operational duties, IEPs (Individual Educational Plans for Special Education students), and the like. Wednesday faculty meetings are filled with business and immediate concerns. Professional waiver days are generally used to meet the top-down demands of State and District.

### *Participants*

There were a total of nine participants representing each grade level from kindergarten through grade six. Special education and support services also had representatives. I extended an invitation to the entire faculty to join the study group, but eventually had to personally approach individuals.

One grade level was actually represented by the daughter of one of the teachers. Wanda, the daughter, was from another grade level, but was willing to double as a representative for her mom's grade level and the beginning teachers. I had been unable to encourage anyone to volunteer from the one particular grade level. During the second year, however, Marian, the mom, did represent her grade level; her daughter Wanda was engaged in post-baccalaureate fieldwork and was no longer at our school.

The nine teachers selected were at different stages of their careers. One (Wanda) was a beginning first year teacher, five were mid-career teachers with ten or more years of experience, and four were veteran teachers with thirty or more years of experience. Of the nine participants, six were Japanese-Americans, one

was Japanese-Chinese American, one was Korean-American, and one was Cosmopolitan. I was elated to have all these participants commit to the teacher study group and trust my leadership.

### *Principal*

The principal had been at the school for about eight years prior to my arrival. Although the idea of the teacher study group was mine, it arose from her offhand comment of how teachers seemed to change very little of what they did over the years. She supported the idea of the study group, and I kept her informed about our progress. She accepted my suggestion that she not be one of the active participants until a “safety zone” emerged. Although she realized that sharing power, giving up some of her control over what teachers did was risky, she welcomed teacher-generated conversation about instructional improvement and classroom practices. She wanted to see more innovation, but realized that it must come from the teachers.

During the first year, the teachers met with me, but not the principal. I took Short’s et al. (1998) advice to heart and felt that teachers would feel freer to experiment and explore and experience an unstructured teacher study group without the principal’s watchful eye. I related to both the teacher study group participants and the principal how Short et al. (1998) viewed the principal’s involvement and suggested we invite the principal as we felt more secure and comfortable with what we were doing. All agreed.

I did, however, act as a liaison between the principal and the teacher study group participants. I usually met with the principal informally or formally on a weekly basis and gave her an update on our progress. I shared with

her how genuinely inspired I was by the caliber of the participants and the depth of their insights. With the participants, I conveyed the principal's support for the group. She was in fact so pleased with the response of the teachers to an uncompensated Saturday morning event, she was providing a stipend of \$500 per participant for the year's participation. Although the teachers had originally agreed to participate without monetary compensation, they felt appreciated by the principal's recognition of their efforts. It was not so much the money, a modest sum for their personal time, that boosted their morale, but the appreciation and acknowledgement of their willingness to contribute to the school's professional growth.

#### My Role as Practitioner-Researcher

When I began this study, I did it out of personal interest as well as part of a doctoral program at the University of Hawaii, College of Education. At the same time, however, I was the assistant principal of the school I was studying. This made me part of the site-based, administrator research that Anderson and Jones (2000) discuss at length. Practitioner research gives voice to those who work closest to the classroom (Anderson, et al., 1994). Research done by administrators is in part scarce because it is often written without explicitly claiming the site as one's own and announcing the researcher role as a dual one. I have made my site and dual role explicit; thus this study has many aspects of practitioner research. I see myself as generating knowledge which has been disseminated and utilized at the same setting. I also see myself as reflecting upon the kinds of dilemmas an administrator faces. At the same time I have also carried out the aspects of formal research by using theoretic bases, accessing

academic knowledge in the literature, as well as university courses, and followed the traditional doctoral process of working with committee members from academia (Anderson & Jones, 2000).

My theory was derived from our diverse “prior professional and general knowledge in the course of the inquiry” (Winter as cited in Anderson & Jones, 2000) as much as it did from the review of the literature.

The first official year of my research, 1999-2000, was my fifth and last year at the school as assistant principal. It was the year I retired from the Department of Education after having served in different capacities for about 34 years. Having completed my doctoral course work during my sabbatical the previous year, I felt it a propitious time to retire and to complete my research.

I say that 1999-2000 was the first “official” year of my research because through my prior four years at the school, I had shared my views often about the need for teachers to have time for professional talk. Some had understood well, some vaguely, and some not at all. Although I was not conducting research in the years prior to 1999-2000 and had not decided about my dissertation topic, the brainstorming and informal conversations in those prior years helped to pave the way.

My research could have ended tidily at the end of the first year. The teacher study group participants asked, however, that I continue to facilitate for at least one more year. Thus, during my retirement in 2000-01, I facilitated the quarterly meetings. No longer on campus on a daily basis, I appreciated better the difficulties of an outsider researcher despite the fact that I could not quite qualify as one. It was more difficult to coordinate everyone’s



schedule and schedule meetings. Email attempts were frustrating as teachers were only connected on the school network that year and were not accustomed to using the email technologically, and/or regularly.

Bunting (1997) exhorts, "The role of the principal in implementing teacher-centered development is that of a catalyst, motivator, and expert. As teachers learn to look within themselves for direction, they will flourish in and out of their classrooms, both as professionals and human beings."

I saw my role as facilitating this study group experience so that the teachers would value it for the professional growth it provides - the possibilities for collegiality, critical reflection, networking, research, and innovation. I saw my role as consultative, initially providing the current research on teacher professional growth and other topics of interest in the group. I saw my role as a participant-researcher examining how the group experiences the teacher study group, how these experiences impact our professional growth, and how this form of professional development impacts the school.

I saw my role as a fragile one - encouraging, but not dictating; persuading, but not mandating; influencing, but not prescribing, analyzing, but not judging. I found it challenging to find time to provide leadership and to facilitate this group in the midst of an assistant principal's increasing job load, trouble-shooting and operational duties.

I was an insider by virtue of being on the school's staff. I was an outsider by virtue of being part of the school administration, not school faculty. Oja (1989) discusses the pros and cons of outsider researcher. An outsider has the problems of distance, status, intimidation, and too much power. An outsider

researcher may have difficulty carrying out the democratic process by the very nature of being an outsider.

On the other hand, an outsider researcher has advantages: 1) He/She aids the busy teachers by activating or initiating the process; 2) He/She provides new resources to the participants. The external resources are helpful so long as they support, rather than direct the teachers' thinking. The teacher must first be provided the time to raise his/her own relevant issues before presented with theory; 3) He/she acts as the catalyst for new ideas and self reflection (Carr & Kemmis, p. 203 as cited in Oja, 1989, p. 163); and 4) He is the organizer, coordinator, negotiator, and disseminator of reports. The University Researcher has the sensitive task of switching his image of "expert" to one of participant with equal status. He/she must "consciously encourage the group to take power for themselves" (Grundy & Kemmis, 1982, p. 71 as cited in Oja, 1989).

In my role as assistant principal, I had some of the advantages of an outsider. I activated the process, shared educational literature, catalyzed self-reflection, and coordinated the research. I was more in a position of being a supporter rather than director of the teachers' thinking. I did not have the decision-making powers of the principal and was thus the administrator with lesser power. My presence did not signal as much of a power differential. In spite of my advocacy for teachers, however, there was that recognition of some power status which may or may not have inhibited participation.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) recognized the merits of the insider researchers "who have worked as both practitioners and researchers and been unwilling to privilege one role over the other" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p.

17). Clandinin (as cited in Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997) warns us of the possible difficulties in collaboration because of the status differential. The ready access I had into this teacher study group, however, provided a very natural opportunity for the collaboration based upon close relationships which she talks about. Empowering relationships develop over time, and I feel I had the advantage of having already developed that over a period of four years prior to forming the study group. Nevertheless, my roles as assistant principal and practitioner-researcher definitely made my perspectives subjective and accompanied by unavoidable biases.

#### Data Collection through Discussion/Reflection

Reflection, a too frequently missing piece in the teaching profession, was a big part of the methodology in conducting the teacher study group. In this study no "recipe" was followed. The purpose of the teacher study group was for teachers to experience professional development in a non-traditional way. There was no outside expert among them; they themselves were the experts.

There was no prescribed or mandated educational issue to focus upon; they themselves set the agenda and decided upon each meeting's focus. This study used the following references as guides, not prescriptions, in the process.

#### *Bayer's Collaborative Apprenticeship Learning (CAL)*

Bayer's (1990) CAL model, based on Vygotskian principles, consists of a general framework of three steps: 1) individual free write, 2) sharing in a small group of three, and 3) public sharing. From these three steps the group begins to generate personal, individual inquiries. The expressive talk can "shape his ideas, modify them by listening to others, question, plan, express doubt, difficulty and

confusion, experiment with new language and feel free to be tentative and incomplete” (Barnes, Britton & Rosen 1975, p. 162 as cited in Bayer, 1990, p. 14).

She also suggests a heterogeneous group which can share diverse experiences. Such a group also allows for different kinds and levels of expertise from which the group can benefit. Her method is based on Vygotsky's process of internalization via the use of language as a semiotic mediation tool. Reflective inner speech is shared publicly to bring about intersubjectivity (shared understanding) among the group participants.

#### *Short's Teacher Study Group*

Short's et al. (1998) study group laid out ground rules, e.g., mutual respect, no one dominating conversation, and trust building. Although guest speakers might be invited, the group itself is considered a group of experts. Avoiding a transmission model allows teachers to see themselves as able to transform themselves.

Short stresses that the why and how, or theory and practice, must both be discussed in order for the group to sustain interest (Short et al., 1998). In her groups there was a definite need to balance just sharing activities with why they do them. She emphasizes the need for reflective dialogue before teachers get caught up in action. She talks about the continuous cycle of action and reflection. She reiterates that Dewey made clear that "when we act without reflection, we act on other people's purposes instead of developing our own purposes" (Short et al., p. 126).

### *Total Faculty Study Groups*

This approach seems similar to our State's Focus on Learning faculty groups. The intent is to focus the entire school on instructional improvement. This approach is a formal process. Its strength is the organization of the whole school. Its weakness is the antithesis of its strength; the teacher-generated inquiries are not foremost (Murphy & Lick, 1998).

Using the above guides my data collection included the transcriptions of all teacher study group sessions – eight from the first year and four from the second year. In addition, there were interview transcripts, journal entries, and documents, e.g., tentative agenda, handouts, questionnaires, and written reflections.

### *Wolcott's Qualitative Research Tree*

This qualitative case study can be conceptualized as parts of Wolcott's graphic tree (Wolcott, 2001, p.90) on qualitative research. He suggests that a participant-observer like me be selective of the composition of the tree, as it is all encompassing, whereas what I use will be tailored to my particular research.

Using Wolcott's visual I recognize the same *roots* of my case study emanating from everyday life – experiencing, enquiring, and examining. The tree trunk as the core is the unpretentious participant observation. He equates qualitative method with fieldwork techniques and strongly suggests restricting this section “to how you obtained the data you used, not how everyone who pursues a qualitative approach goes about getting theirs” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 97).

Thus, the *branches* of the tree indicate how I obtained my data. As the tree is a metaphor for the everyday nature of the research, so the branches represent

the everyday nature of the data and its collection. I will defer to Wolcott's discussion and include method only as it is relevant to how I conducted my research.

My "branches" were the following:

- 1) Participant-observation of teacher study group sessions for two years. All sessions were taped and transcribed. In the transcriptions I selected the narratives of personal significance, of personal insights, and of group intersubjectivity. I looked for themes and wrote those selections into the descriptive narrative according to the themes and used them for analysis and interpretation.
- 2) Individual interviews over a span of two years. In the course of the two years and beyond I conducted both formal and informal individual interviews to inquire about individual experiences within the teacher study group. Some were audiotaped, some were on telephone, and some were impromptu.
- 3) Journal entries. Participants wrote voluntarily and intermittently in these. I responded and conversed through writing with them.
- 4) Documents such as tentative agenda, handouts, written reflections, information/literature shared with the total faculty.

Case studies generally collect data through the three strategies

of interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents. Not all three are used equally, however (Merriam, 1998).

### Data Analysis

Triangulation through taped sessions, interviews, and journal entries were used for data analysis. Creswell (1998) suggests for a case study, a detailed description, including a chronology of events and the contexts in which they occur. He incorporates Stake's (1995 as cited in Creswell, 1998) use of :

- 1) categorical aggregation, a search for a collection of relevant meanings,
- 2) direct interpretation, a search for meaning from one single instance,
- 3) patterns, a search for their correspondence to other categories, and
- 4) naturalistic generalizations, a search for possible applicability to other cases.

I collected narrative data in much the same way Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest. I used a combination of taped sessions, field notes on observations and interviews, and teacher narratives as transcribed from audiotapes and as written in journals. I also did some dialoging through writing in the journals. My purpose was to follow Eisner's (1991) advice of working with the teachers, and not conducting commando raids. We worked towards the ultimate ideal which was for study groups to be part of the teachers' regular workday and professional duties (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1988).

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1988), "Narrative is the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future" (p.

24). Narrative is about all of life, a part of which is school. What we, both teachers and students, are in school reflects the whole of our life.

The data was examined for common themes in the experiences of the teachers from the study sessions, personal interviews, and written reflections. I periodically rechecked with participants to explore what they themselves saw as indicators of their professional growth. The data was also examined for factors which contributed to the group process and factors which impeded it.

The process was not as formalized as Preskill and Torres' *evaluative inquiry* (1999), but the components I looked for are similar. First, I looked for dialogue in which knowledge was shared. Second, I looked for reflection in which the perspectives from self, others and the system were explored. Third, I looked for the raising of questions for the identifying and clarification of values, beliefs, and assumptions.

A caution from Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) is not to let a narrative research dissolve without effecting change. In order to effect change she proposes an interaction of educational theories with personal narratives (Elbaz). A similar caution is given by Short et al. (1998) who stated that the theory and practice must be linked by asking "how" and "why." Elbaz-Luwisch's goal is what I strove to achieve—to develop a theoretical understanding of teaching, validate it, let it guide educational practice, and have teachers recognize their own power in the act of teaching. Marble supports the empowerment of teachers through narrative; it is a way for each teacher to construct his/her own meaningful stories. In triangulating the data gathered from taped discussions, interviews and journal



writing, I checked for the accuracy of my recorded data (Nolan & Meister, 2000; Merriam, 1998).

### Process of Inquiry

Richardson (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 p. 923) notes that “narrative writing is in itself a type of inquiry.” Wolcott (1994) succinctly organizes the process of inquiry into what he calls three emphases - description, analysis, and interpretation. I have followed his model. Instead of a section for findings, I have written a section combining description and analysis. Instead of a section for discussion, I have concluded with a section on interpretation.

1) Description: What is going on here? Because the researcher in qualitative work is the tool or instrument, Wolcott makes it a point of negating any kind of “immaculate perception” (1994, p.13). According to him, the descriptions are written through the filtered lens of the researcher - a human being who makes decisions on what to include, what to exclude, what is relevant for his/her research purposes. They zoom in and out, selectively giving more exposure to certain details than to others. They can be presented in a variety of ways of which I have selected the narrator mode, from a broad to particular context or vice versa. Wolcott stresses using the interviewee’s own words, but not going overboard in letting the data speak for itself. The researcher is responsible for sifting out what is important and what to emphasize.

In my case study I reviewed my transcripts from the taped sessions and interviews, sifted through the study group sessions, and used the participants’ own words to identify what types of semiotic mediation occurred, what relationships and connections were developed to create professional

development. What I found important and emphasized definitely reflected my own personal biases in the whole process.

2) Analysis: How do things work? Why is it not working? How might it work better?

In the analysis I looked for patterns which emerged. The evolution of patterns is part of the constructivist grounded theory, studying people in their natural setting. Glaser (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 512) "advocates gathering data without forcing either preconceived questions or frameworks upon it." Data gathering includes "observations, conversations, formal interviews, autobiographies, public records, organizational reports, respondents' diaries and journals, and our own tape-recorded reflections" (Charmaz as cited Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 514). The patterns from the data are woven into a compelling narrative which reveals the findings. "Qualitative research depends on the presentation of solid descriptive data, so that the researcher leads the reader to an understanding of the meaning of the experience under study" (Janesick, 2000, p. 390). Janesick says that in 1994 she advocated triangulation, collecting data from various sources, as part of qualitative research; since then, however, she has advocated Richardson's (1994 as cited in Janesick, 2000) proposal of crystallization, a metaphor for holding up a crystal and examining/appreciating its many facets. In my study I have triangulated data by using various sources, but I am also aware of Richardson's image of qualitative research as a crystal which grows and changes. "What we see when we view a crystal, for example, depends on how we view it, how we hold it up to the light or not" (Janesick, 2000, p. 392).

According to Wolcott (1994), analysis is to show what we are getting right - it is "being right as far as it goes rather than going as far as it can" (p. 175). It is looking for patterns that are significant. To analyze change in a research process, the researcher must first establish how things were in the first place. Because of the short time period in which a research study is conducted, Wolcott (1994) suggests focusing on the change efforts, if dramatic change in that short period is not forthcoming. He also notes that institutions tend to adapt rather than embrace change. He suggests that even a study on change which is less than successful might reveal insights on how a social system is maintained or committed to the status quo.

In the process of developing my study group, I analyzed how this form of professional development was working, why it might not be working, and how to improve the process. I listened and observed to understand the process of a teacher study group. I struggled with myself to avoid using power to control the group or the outcome. I looked for emerging patterns in the transcripts. I focused on the changes which occurred and the personal relationships which developed.

3) Interpretation: What does all this mean? Whereas the analysis was linked to what others said in the data, interpretation is the knowledge the researcher creates as a result of the description and analysis. Wolcott (1994) cautions the researcher to carefully make the connections from the text to the interpretation and not to overreach. He would "rather err on the side of too little interpretation than too much" (p. 259). His own work in interpretation helped "to open things up rather than seal them up" (p. 260). He further suggests that

an extended time for reflection gives birth to new perspectives.

Without psychometric measures, I was the research instrument. In being so, I adhered to the ethics of confidentiality and informed consent. In the interpretation I needed to be careful to avoid big leaps without the supporting data. I needed to reflect on the process and to derive new inquiries from the data.

I used my writing skills to do justice to the participants, examined and refined concepts in the data, made connections within the data, identified significant elements of the data by reviewing the triangulated data, and supported findings with direct quotes from the descriptive data.

### Principles of Qualitative Research

How much do I include or exclude in the final report? How best to present the information without causing harm to anyone? Some newer conditions and contexts of participant-observer research in the schools are (Janesick, 2000):

1) Qualitative research is holistic. It attempts to understand all aspects of the whole and does not seek to assert power over others.

2) Qualitative research deals with personal interrelationships.

3) Qualitative research is contextually set over a period of time.

4) Within qualitative research, the researcher is the tool or research instrument, making observations and interpretations.

5) Qualitative research requires informed consent and is ethically responsible.

6) Qualitative research recognizes the role of the researcher and his/her perspectives and biases.

7) Qualitative research constructs an authentic narrative of the

participants involved.

8) Qualitative research involves ongoing data analysis.

### Generalizability and Validity

Validity, generalizability, and reliability are psychometric terms borrowed from quantitative research. Validity in qualitative research can be construed as the fit between the description and the explanation. There is no one way to match the puzzle pieces, but the completed picture must make sense and be credible. Wolcott (1990a, 1995 as cited in Janesick, 2000), however, points out the anomaly of making valid no one, correct answer. Generalizability also belongs to quantitative research and its use in qualitative research is being refuted (Donmoyer, 1990 as cited in Janesick, 2000). Uniqueness and meaning are the distinguishing features of a qualitative case study. The human element, the passion for the study and its participants, and the personalization distinguish the qualitative research from psychometrics in quantitative research.

### Validity in Practitioner Research

Anderson (1994) suggests defining validity for Practitioner Research, research which seeks change in educational practice, with the following five specific criteria. These measures will be referred to again in the section on description and analysis.

1) Democratic validity - the inclusion of all stakeholders so that the research is not done at the expense of others.

2) Outcome validity - the extent to which the problem was resolved and for whom it was successful, if so.

3) Process validity - indication of ongoing learning and triangulation of

data.

4) Catalytic validity - all participants, including the researcher, examined their perspective of reality.

5) Dialogic validity - finding a peer to be the devil's advocate or doing the research collaboratively with a peer.

How generalizable is the experience of this particular teacher study group?

One would have to consider the prior experiences of the participants. Although they had not experienced a teacher study group like this before, several had had prior experiences with collaboration, e.g. three on two teaching, cooperating-student teacher supervision, the MET (Masters of Education Teaching) program, a math grant team, and district consortiums. Even with the participants' rich experiences, they experienced dilemmas with facilitation.

One might ask then if there are better ways we might explore for facilitation or whether the total school articulation groups might have been delayed a year. One might then wonder, however, what strain or distance this might create between the teacher study group participants and the rest of the faculty. Fullan (1993) indicates that teacher-leader roles tend to distance them from the rest of the teachers. Teacher-leaders need to keep close to the grassroots and be sensitive to their needs. The ideal is for *all* teachers to work with a sense of purpose.

The two-year process in which the school experimented with this alternate form of professional development evolved and was not prescribed. It was through that process, however, that the results were the outcome. Schools wishing to replicate the process would have to assess their own context and make

adjustments accordingly.

### Limitations

This study is limited to the context of this one elementary school with its specific and small number of participants. It is limited in scope and not generalizable beyond the nine participants and school. It is also limited because it is I, the researcher, who decided on what qualified as significant and relevant for inclusion in the study.

Furthermore, as a practitioner researcher, I had tacit knowledge accumulated over four years at the work site. Although such tacit knowledge can serve as an advantage, it can also serve as a disadvantage because of accompanying biases such as my own preconceived ideas and basic assumptions.

### Ethics

The agreement I made to the teacher study group was that all information would be confidential and that participants would be anonymous. At any time in our teacher study group sessions, participants were free to request that the tape recording be turned off. I honored their every request.

One of the ground rules was that our focus would be on instructional improvement and issues, and not “talking stink,” a local term meaning talk which denigrated others or was negative and non-productive. Trust building was very important. The teachers had to trust that I was there as a co-learner with no hidden agenda, that my connection to the principal would work positively for them. The principal, too, had to trust that our talk would result in positive benefits for the school.

## Summary

Finding and providing time for teachers to have professional conversations about instructional practices and educational issues was my hope. As a participant-observer and practitioner researcher, I examined the experiences of participants in the teacher study group and the issues which impacted the development of such a group. The challenge was allowing the "how" and use of study group to evolve without creating another kind of top-down, forced, prescribed form of professional development.



## CHAPTER IV. DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of the participants in a teacher study group and to better understand the process and issues impacting the development of a teacher study group at the school level over a two-year period. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions.

- 1) What are the experiences of teachers as they participate in a study group?
- 2) What are the issues that impact the development of a study group at the school level?
- 3) What is the role of administration in the development of a study group?
- 4) What were my experiences as a practitioner researcher, as an insider-outsider, and as an assistant principal facilitating a teacher study group?

Three major themes emerged from the data: the influence of the study group on teacher socialization and professional growth; the dilemmas of creating study groups within a school; and the impact of the study group on school change. Teacher socialization in the study group opened up discussion on critical educational issues and personally impacted participants. The dilemmas of creating study groups within a school included finding the time, gaining grassroots support, and facilitating the use of the time. In the study group process, school change evolved. Participants worked with the principal to find time which would not depend upon funding, not detract from instructional time, and be a regular part of the work week for all teachers.

### Theme 1: Influence of Study Group

The influence of the study group on teacher socialization and

professional growth emerged from the transcripts of taped sessions, interviews, and journal entries.

### *Teachers as Learners*

Although all participants were familiar with each other as members of the school faculty, contact had been limited as each belonged to a different grade level or department. The study group sessions provided an opportunity for participants to get personally acquainted and to share personal stories. At the first session I asked the participants to reflect upon their own learning experiences. They expressed some of the insecurities they had felt as learners. Kaitlin said, "I felt stupid because I did well on the tests, but I didn't really know what I was supposed to know."

Faye had been an average student in school, but credited one of her teachers for making her feel special:

I was always an average student in the top group.

I never felt special until one teacher really built my self-esteem. She made me feel special when I could do something the best. She's been my role model.

Rita, who also grew up at the time when homogeneous grouping was common in schools, had a similar experience:

In school, I always felt that they put me in a high class, but I thought I didn't belong. One day the teacher thought it was great the way I could work my formulas. It made me think...I wonder... I didn't know if I was smart or not. Ei, I said, maybe I am a little smart.

I could resonate with those comments, too. I did well in school

academically, but never felt smart enough. Could it be that we as students are straining, in spite of good grades, because we are trying to fit a prescribed mold rather than excitedly reaching out to build upon our interests and understanding?

Others connected themselves as learners with themselves as teachers.

Trudy explained:

I'm a very visual person. I've got to see it, do it, then I can remember. I don't even like to read manuals on how to do something, or how to put something together. I just like to have someone SHOW me...I use a lot of visuals, I always...we're always doing stuff, we're always talking about things, but yeah, that's how I am.

This teacher exhibited the need for intersubjectivity, someone showing her how to do it, someone talking with her about things – an expert with an apprentice, in Vygotskian theory. “That’s how I learn and that’s how I teach,” she said. And indeed she does; her classroom is a buzz of activity with lots of interaction – teacher/adult-pupil and pupil-pupil.

Annie compared herself as a learner to herself as a teacher today and expressed how she had higher expectations for her students. She said,

The demands I place on my students today are a lot more than was placed on me growing up. I was pleased with my Stanford Achievement Test stanines, but I never felt like the teacher had pushed me to achieve anything higher than what I was capable of.

Julia declared that learning had not been pleasant for her, so she deliberately teaches in a way she was not taught: “My class is ...kind of noisy, but good kind noise...controlled chaos, not chaos. Controlled...lots of moving around

and doing things and not so much just sitting.”

Julia’s students on campus were indeed often on the move – on projects with media deadlines and classroom experimentation.

Tobie, a former student of Julia, talked about how he has changed. He said his attention span was the size of a walnut, “fifteen minutes tops.” He continued:

It got me into lots of trouble from school (pointing laughingly to Julia) to home to every day life. Two questions helped me pay attention more, and things started to fall in place. Why am I doing this? What has this got to do with me? This has affected my teaching a lot and to make things relevant.

Wanda summed it up when she said, “We are affected by the way we were taught. We don’t necessarily remember lectures. We remember things if we can experience it ourselves...I remember the experiences more than the textbooks.”

Brookfield (1995) notes that we respond to the way we were taught either by replicating what affirmed us as learners or avoiding a repetition of the humiliation we felt. The most poignant way of changing one’s teaching, Brookfield (1995) maintains, is putting one’s self in the role of a learner. Sharing their personal stories about their own learning helped participants to reveal some of their personal selves to each other and to connect who they were as persons and to who they were as teachers. Reflecting upon their experiences helped them to see each other as co-learners and to make connections to the kind of learning environment they were creating for their students in their classrooms. It was important for participants to reflect upon the importance of their life experiences and the contribution of their experiences to their professional knowledge.

### *Educational Issues*

At every session I circulated a summary of the reflections and thoughts from the previous session. Participants connected with some of the reflections and thoughts and spontaneously raised educational issues of concern.

#### *Standards*

One recurring issue was the statewide thrust for standards-based education. Kaitlin had attended a meeting in which the State Superintendent had addressed standards and voiced her concerns.

Trudy wondered about how the standards would affect her kindergartners and directed her concerns to Myrtle who was familiar with the pre-kindergarten program in special education:

When I compare what you're doing in the SPED (Special Education) preschool with our regular kindergartners, then all our kindergartners belong in preschool because they could never meet the standards that are placed on those kids.

Rita joined in and expressed how she was so overwhelmed by the standards and had needed to throw out some of her creative activities like simulation because they took too much time. She had, for example, devised a very creative lesson on the stock market with her students learning how to be investors, but now she felt there was no time for that.

Annie related the experience of a friend on the mainland who talked about children there:

They didn't even learn to read till they were in second

grade. She says now in kindergarten they got them reading, and we're pushing them so much earlier...are they really ready for it and is that why so many children are labeled as slow learners. Maybe they're just not ready.

This issue stuck in Kaitlin's mind, and in the next session she shared some of her thoughts and questioning. She said:

I selected the thought of pushing kids so much earlier. Are they really ready and is that why so many are labeled slow learners? I selected that one because I just got two kids who are retainees. Interestingly, these are two kids that I don't think would normally have been retained because they weren't your slow-slow ones; they were like your average students.

These are kids who were putting in a lot of effort, and the parents were frustrated. I got them this year, and I thought, "Oh gosh, now I really have to work with these kids...I have to do different things because you don't want them to fall into the same thing again." Actually, they're doing *wonderfully*, just with the regular curriculum. So how do we take a look at readiness? Just the other night I went to listen to our Superintendent. You don't want to be slaves to the standards and make decisions that the kid has to know all of this. So actually right now, this is just going through my mind.... readiness for kids and yet, you got these standards, and how do we balance all of that?

Trudy listened and agreed with her own doubts:

That bothers me because you know what, no matter how many standards you have, readiness is so important in the learning process...and until, I

mean, it could be like the last month and finally with readiness, it sinks in and they pick up like this...but until they're at that point and they're ready to learn, you cannot *make* them...I don't know about standards.

This issue of standards would come up again throughout the sessions. As the facilitator and as the administrator, I had no easy answers. As a participant, I had as many questions as they did. At a later meeting, I brought various journal articles with different perspectives on the standards and had each participant choose the one he/she might be interested in reading. I felt that as facilitator, as participant, as administrator, and as researcher, I could only try to shed more light on the problem, continue to encourage the questioning, and to help participants consider different perspectives.

We never came to a resolution about the standards. We did not focus any one meeting on standards alone. As more administrative information about the standards filtered to the schools, teachers basically wondered how they could comply and have students reach the benchmarks at the times indicated and how sanctions would be meted out. As with the Apex team (Nolan & Meister, 2000), the teachers were being expected to follow through on a top-down decision to implement the standards. In such a transmission approach, teachers and administration were struggling with questions of how to put the mandate into practice. In contrast to this technical model of standards in which the teachers were the recipients of someone else's knowledge, this study group was attempting to participate in constructing their own meaningful knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

### *The Reading Process*

At one session I introduced Routman's book *Literacy at the Crossroads*. I felt it could provide issues which the grade levels could choose to discuss. I provided a two-page handout, which summarized the issues.

A discussion evolved about reading and the programs which teachers had experienced. Annie mentioned that her mainland friend told her whole language was no longer a trend. Trudy continued the conversation by saying that teachers misunderstood whole language to be a system, not a philosophy. She also felt the videos on whole language were unrealistic. "What was everyone else doing while this particular group was in focus?"

Trudy also pointed out that new teachers in particular had difficulties in not knowing the grade's curriculum and expectations. Veterans could improvise using prior knowledge from past experience with different kinds of curriculum, but that it was easy for new teachers to get lost; they needed to know the skills, know what to do, not miss everything. I pointed out that Routman similarly said that in California, teachers mistakenly thought whole language meant totally no skills.

Julia joined in the conversation of how children learn to read by relating a personal story:

At two years of age, my son was in the principal's office when I went to pick him up at Preschool. I wondered what had happened. The principal told me my son knew how to read! I was surprised, too, because I don't know how he learned. No one sat down to teach him. I guess everyone learns differently.



Trudy, having experienced emergent reading daily with her students, shared what they do in kindergarten.

There's the alphabet and visual recognition. We say, "This word is Tom...Tom...ride. Ride, Tom." It's repetitious. Sometimes they don't even know the alphabet or sounds...it's visual recognition and reading.

A conversation followed about reading versus decoding and word recognition, about memorization as part of emergent reading, and reading comprehension. By piecing together some of their experiences, both personal and professional, the teachers constructed new pieces to their knowledge about the reading process. They were constructing their understanding of the reading process in a way, which made sense to them and their prior knowledge. In sharing individual contributions they were piecing together the whole. Their short conversation was closer to accomplishing what a statewide mandated literacy program called Success Compact failed to do. Marble (1997) analyzed the failure of that literacy movement well. Success Compact was holistic and combined both sound and meaning in the reading process. Unfortunately, the "experts" who transmitted the approach failed to help teachers build upon prior knowledge and construct the whole system. Instead, the focus was on the tedious parts and pieces such as synthetic phonics.

My own personal story is integrally connected to Marble's (1997) revelation. In the 1970's, knowledge of the SRA linguistic method of reading was transmitted to us in the school at which I was a classroom teacher. The approach and planned program, in my opinion, had disastrous effects on the reading progress of our students.

In an attempt to gain better understanding, I registered in a reading difficulties course at the university during one summer. In that course I learned to understand the spectrum of the reading process. Both the sound system and comprehension are important. Teaching either one to the exclusion of the other only creates problems for young readers. That course was an epiphany for me and helped me to make better decisions for struggling readers.

My wish was that all teachers would have the same knowledge. It might have been realized in Success Compact of the 1990's for the approach was based on that same reading course I took and created by the same educator. Unfortunately, as Marble (1997) points out, it became another topdown mandated program which ignored the prior experience of teachers and failed to co-construct knowledge as co-learners.

In a simple conversation, the study group participants had co-constructed some very important pieces to the holistic picture of the reading process.

### *Special Education*

Special education was always a "hot topic" since it seemed to affect us daily. I, as assistant principal, saw an inordinate amount of time being spent on special education students and parents. The principal was constantly in individual education program (IEP) meetings. Counselors and I were frequently contacting community resources for special services, working with special education students who had acted inappropriately and were sent to the office. Classroom teachers were unpredictably called out of their classrooms to be

present at meetings parents requested. Some classes were thus being taught by substitutes much of the time. I said:

Both the unions for teachers and educational officers are not speaking up about SPED. There's nothing more we can do; we're actually drowning. The rights of regular students are being trampled upon. We don't have time to spend with the regular kids. We don't even know what they look like. All of our time is being spent with kids with special problems. I know about inclusion and mainstreaming, but maybe we have gone too far.

Trudy agreed, "It's not fair in class to regular students."

Kaitlin asked, "Is it law that we mainstream?"

Julia volunteered, "On the mainland I hear SPED students are taught separately and not part of inclusion. How come?"

Wanda, our authority on special education, said, "Yeah, it's separate there."

Julia said, "Marian told me that she feels like a psychologist giving kids emotional support, doing so many things detracting from her real job."

Remembering all the times that various teachers had made a difference in the lives of some of our most difficult SPED students and helped to create changed lives, I said, "Luckily, we have experienced teachers like all of you." My comment was spontaneous and sincere. One of the reasons to break teacher isolation is to recognize the good that teachers do in order that those good practices can be replicated by themselves, as well as by their colleagues.

Rita recounted how on a class field trip she noticed three of her boys sitting on the mat. The thought struck her that they were the only three "normal" boys in her class. The others were special education students, emotionally

impaired, attention deficit disorder, or had serious family problems, e.g. an incarcerated parent. Before she could focus on academics, she said, she needed to show a lot of caring and help her students work through some of their immediate emotional needs. Rita's insight was an important one. She saw herself as one with her students and saw the need for connectedness. Palmer (1997) is talking about such a teacher when he says the good teacher integrates intellect, emotion, and spirit within the human self.

In response to the media report that the Department of Education was considering paying mainland teachers \$10,000 more per year to teach SPED classes here, a discussion ensued. Rita shared her conversation with the legislators, telling them about how experienced teachers - teacher who had proven their capabilities - should be compensated to be the special education teachers. New teachers, incapable of providing services, were impacting the regular classes. It seemed that the system had it backwards wanting to compensate new, untried teachers to lure them into special education.

Issues like the reading process, standards, and special education are complex and have multiple perspectives. It was at times uncomfortable and frustrating not to have all the answers, but I think part of the study group process and professional development is to recognize just that. Recognizing the lack of clear answers to many of the educational issues compels teachers and administrators to continue to question and continue to collaborate on possibilities. Recognizing the need for questioning will nurture professional growth far more than blind acceptance of decisions made by other people's assumptions. Recognizing that no one has the perfect answer also empowers

teachers and administration to realize they are going to have to participate by continuing to question and to seek answers. It is out of such questions that this form of professional development can grow into teacher research and depart even more sharply from traditional professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

### *Beginning Teachers*

One of my motivations for creating a teacher study group in the school was to have the more experienced teachers share and pass on some of their expertise to the beginning or mid-career teachers. Having observed the dedication, caring, and skill of many of our veteran faculty members, I was anxious to have such professional knowledge and human resources spread throughout the organizational culture of the school before many of them retired. We talked about beginning teachers and how we could best support them. Rita, especially, echoed my feelings and expressed the urgency with which we needed to support beginning teachers:

Research says if you don't tap a teacher within the first three years and really motivate and stimulate them, they go in a rut and I really see a lot of waste of mental power...I see a lot of teachers not operating at their maximum.

According to Fullan (1993), the vast majority of beginning teacher experiences are traumatic. Beginning teachers struggle with management and giving instruction. Rita continued by sharing about her beginning teacher experience:

I had a hard time when I started. My supervisor said, "Some people have it

and some don't, and you don't." In my early years I would be very intimidated even at my experience level of five years...I would be intimidated walking into a class of students who were going to view me as the newcomer...scary. I had to take it day by day...step by step...Kids understand...we need time to settle in.

For me Rita's story was reminiscent of Brookfield's (1995) own feelings of being an impostor as the college professor. It also seemed to me that it was vulnerability like this, which became part of the bonding glue in the study group because we all had high regard for Rita and considered her a master teacher. The principal and I had both on occasions nominated her for teacher awards. Had she been defeated by her supervisor's words, many children's lives would not have been changed and charged with a love for learning.

Julia talked about the potential in beginning teachers and the ongoing learning process:

When you first begin teaching, you're not going to be that same teacher you'll be in five years. There's so much learning and teaching that goes with the job...more than one gets going to school... a teacher's not going to be as good as she will be next year or the year after...With teachers it's learning as we go.

Wanda, the youngest in the group, said, "Yeah, in the beginning it can be a bit intimidating working with all the people you've known for years." She was referring to our school at which her mom and "aunties" were on staff.

Tobie, who had been mentored by many of his "aunties" within the faculty, shared some of his beginnings and present misgivings.

Until I'm set and comfortable with myself, I'm not going to be comfortable being a teacher. When I came into teaching I was pretty fired up...I never felt I had to live up to someone's standards....I was just going to be myself....I knew I wanted to be a teacher....I had confidence in myself....I was going to do whatever I thought was right.

I've been away in a foreign country and I was by myself. I became a pretty different person from when I had left. Now back in the classroom I'm having doubts again. Who am I as a person...I'm at that level...it is affecting my teaching...I'm not giving the 120% to my students...now I'm a factor and until I settle myself, I can't give as much as I'd like to give or should give or used to give.

There is here a recognition of how one's personal self is very much tied to one's professional self. Beatty (1999) acknowledged the need to adapt the principles of adult learning in staff development. He deemed it important for adults to ask who they are and what they need in order to direct their own professional development. Although Tobie seemed to be rethinking his decision to be a teacher, the others were very supportive of him. Both Julia and Trudy attested to his creativity in the classroom and his insightful contributions to dialogue with student teachers when they had all in the Masters of Education Teaching (MET) program. "He's quite profound," Julia, his mentor, said.

Tobie continued by sharing his beginning experience:

When I started at this school...I had a hard time seeing teachers as peers...I had looked up to teachers...went into teaching because I looked up to them...to relate on a peer level was hard.

I asked a grade level if I could come into their classrooms whenever I could...arranged for resource people to come in to watch my class. I'd go to pretty much everyone's classroom for about 2 weeks...at least 45 minutes a day...just to watch...what in the world is everyone doing. I'd kind of feel more assured of what I was doing...helps because you learn the curriculum.

Wow! Tobie, now a mid-career teacher, had begun his teaching career on a high! His willingness and creativity in initiating visitations for his own professional development were amazing. He said he had felt quite safe because he knew his mom and "aunties" at school all loved and cared about him. I was greatly impressed because I was not being too successful in getting teachers to visit or be visited by each other for professional sharing and growth.

Participants reflected upon their own experiences and identified the supports which had sustained them in the beginning years. Faye recalled her beginning as a teacher: "I was really lucky to start on the Leeward coast where I had a lot of other young teachers with me. I had a lot of support to ease the transition."

The support that Faye alluded to is probably the type of voluntary conversation group Rust (1999) sees as a necessity for beginning teachers. He found most success with such conversation groups when it was voluntary and attendance was fluid, not mandatory, and open to newcomers. He also suggests a mix of pre-service and in-service teachers for apprenticing and professional growth.

Julia had a similar beginning:



You know when we first started, we were all together... we all just came out of college...all young teachers...we'd talk about our classroom problems...we worked very closely together, and it really helped to know that it wasn't happening only to me, but that it was a common problem. We helped each other solve our problems. We don't have that nowadays. That was a study group of sorts, huh?

Conversing with each other about their problems and experiences seemed to have created the kind of narratives which expanded their knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991). The connection that Julia made between her earlier experience with teacher socialization and her present experience with the study group was pivotal in her making sense of the group process. She had originally been unclear about our purpose and had joined the group because she admired my being a lifelong learner and wanted to support me in my dissertation process. She was later very instrumental in organizing the faculty for support of time for articulation, or professional talk, time.

In her journal, Trudy recounted her beginning teacher experience:

My beginning was a nightmare. I was so anxious to teach my very own class, ready to use all the ideas and experiences. But after the first three days with first grade, I told my supervisor that I was going to quit teaching. I was depressed and sick to my stomach.

The class had rebelled against me. I had no classroom management. It was a zoo and chaotic. How about having children throwing crayons across the room, throwing things off the shelf on to the floor or having a little boy push his chair around and around the classroom, not to mention

that I couldn't even teach the lessons I planned? No one listened!!

Well, it wasn't the children that weren't listening - it was me.

Thanks to my supportive and encouraging supervisor, I stayed in the profession and learned a valuable lesson. I had gone into the classroom after observing the class and the first semester teacher with the idea that I was going to change the behavior of the children. My great mistake was that I didn't even try to get to know the children and the reasons for their behaviors before I tried to get them to perform the way I wanted them to.

Only after I made the effort to know my children and became aware of their backgrounds, their needs and accepted them as individuals was I able to be an effective teacher. I grew with my children and was sad to leave them at the end of the year.

This experience has had a great impact on me as a teacher. I learned acceptance and compassion.

Trudy excitedly shared her self-revelation in an interview:

Hazel, you know what I just realized and took for granted all these years? I actually have articulation time built in my school day. Being in a double classroom and having another teacher with me every day has given me the opportunity to articulate and collaborate on a daily basis. I have the opportunity to make observations, learn or share teaching strategies, try new lessons and ideas, discuss issues of concern and even share beliefs, philosophies, and readings.

Of course, it's only the two of us and not a big block of time, but it is continuous throughout the day. No wonder I always liked the big

classroom. It's so nice to have other adults to relate to.

Trudy's journaling helped her not only to recount her experiences, but to gain fresh insights which transform her experiences. She had through the sessions recognized how early mentoring, the three on two teaming, working as a cooperating teacher, being involved in the MET program, participating on a grant team also scaffolded her learning experiences to sculpt her into the teacher she was. Her journaling did indeed help her to create herself and to find an even stronger voice (Cooper, 1991). Her restorying is an essential component of her personal and professional growth (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991).

Through their sharing of personal stories, participants seemed to have constructed some very sound theories of teacher socialization and teacher education. It was this kind of sharing which seemed to motivate them to return to the study group sessions. Making sense of their collective experiences was relevant and meaningful to their personal and professional growth.

The study group participants also seemed to recognize, probably without knowing or naming the Vygotskian theory, how learning was a two-way thing. They had been learners as apprentice teachers. and later the experts, mentoring the apprentices in programs like student teaching and MET. They grew as learners when they were the experts and when they were the apprentices; the direction of learning was two-way. Kaitlin, Trudy, Julia, Rita, and Tobie often looked back upon their time as cooperating teachers as a stimulating and meaningful time. Faye was beginning her experience as cooperating teacher. Annie had been a student teacher at the school and been mentored both formally and informally by some in the group.

Fortunately, even those participants, whose beginning years had been difficult, found their way by subsequent mentoring or collegial support. Fullan (1993) draws a direct correlation between how teachers experience their beginning years to how they evolve as competent professionals. This correlation speaks ever so strongly for teacher education to be continuous learning; learning cannot stop at graduation.

### *The Value of "Talk"*

I prepared "cliff notes," or a summary, of Brookfield's (1999) thoughts on discussion. He saw discussion as necessary for democracy and for human growth. He also saw discussion as more serious than informal conversation, requiring participants to be mutually responsive to different views.

Wanda, the youngest member, opened up the discussion, by pointing out the sensitivity we need to cultivate for discussion. She said, "Some children, who are outcasts and not afraid to speak up, get ridiculed. We have to remind the children that everyone has a say, a right to be part of the discussion."

Julia commented on dynamic conversations children generate on their own. When having her students do experiments or projects, she sometimes roams around the room with a clipboard to record what they're saying. She hears comments like, "Try it this way. Yeah, good idea." The children's comments indicate they acknowledged what was said. The teacher's written record revealed why each statement helped the process.

In response to Julia's experience, Trudy said:

I like your idea of writing down what you hear. Kids have so much to say. They can't WAIT for each other in a small group when they're trying to resolve a problem. I just listen to what they're saying...my God; such little ones can say that? And they think this way? Amazing! I like the writing part - documenting. I can't remember everything, but if I jot things down, I'll have something.

Julia and Trudy, without knowing, seemed to have caught on to the use of Vygotsky's intersubjectivity in the children's small group discussions. They also gave me clues as to what made their classes alive with activity and children eager to attend their classes.

From her children's talk about Pokeman, Myrtle created a "whole language" unit with books, spelling, vocabulary, chapter books, map skills. She was very pleased with her special education students' high interest and what they learned in the process. She exclaimed, "Lots of good stuff! Very exciting! To them they weren't working!"

I affirmed her success by relating the story of how one of her students had come to my office for discipline and was not quite reachable till I made a connection with him through a Pokeman chart on my office door. Myrtle shared that she tried to treat her students like family and taught them the way she did her own children, using real-life experiences to build upon their interests.

By sharing the value they placed on talk as a way of learning, participants prompted Annie to examine her assumption about talk in the classroom. She said: Sometimes I hear a lot of off-task talking, and I say, "Does that mean you're finished?" Maybe I ought to let them do a little bit of socializing, yet

knowing they have to reach a certain goal by the end of the period.

Participants not only gave each other new strategies, but also exemplified a vital way of learning we have traditionally not allowed in the classroom. I concluded this topic on discussion with Brookfield's (1999) list of the benefits of discussion and how all of this helps us as teachers, and kids as learners, be co-creators of knowledge. He cited the benefits of exploring diversity of perspectives, of tolerating ambiguity, recognizing assumptions, encouraging listening, appreciating differences, being intellectually agile, connecting students to the topic, respecting voices and experiences, teaching democratic discourse, affirming participants as co-creators of knowledge, developing capacity for clear communication, developing collaborative learning, increasing empathy, developing synthesis and integration, and leading to transformation.

#### *Camaraderie and Socialization*

The energy and enthusiasm of participants in the teacher study group sessions were quite evident in the first year. Responses from all but one participant expressed how they appreciated the camaraderie and socialization.

Tobie, the one exception, felt the sessions were cutting into his personal time, e.g. weekend activities such as football games. Although he engaged in conversation and shared his insights on some issues, he decided after the first year that he needed to focus on other personal priorities and left the group. Because the agreement was participants could voluntarily leave at any time, I honored that agreement and reluctantly "let" him go. I had no power to retain him. Tobie had been honest in his participation and was a teacher who saw outside of the box. Was the profession in danger of losing him because it

constrains teachers to think inside of the box?

Myrtle also wanted to leave the group, but I convinced her to continue. Because special education students had music with their homeroom teachers, the five music teachers did not relieve special education teachers for a department articulation time. Myrtle, who represented the special education department, thus did not have a group to facilitate, but wrote profusely in her journal about struggles with special education issues. At the session, she shared:

For me the time with this study group is articulation time. I like it because I get to hear different ideas and I get a lot of ideas and I like to hear what people are doing in different grade levels. And um it's good to hear that our department is not the only one that has problems, and that all the departments have their own problems.

For Myrtle, an experienced teacher, but one new to our school, the teacher study group helped to put a chip in her wall of isolation.

Being in the group helped her to get acquainted with teachers from different grades in the school.

In contrast to Myrtle, Julia was a veteran teacher in the school.

In an interview with me, she related how although she had even taught some of the participants' own children, this was the first time she had had an opportunity to know these colleagues on a personal level.

From my perspective as an administrator, I assumed that even though the teachers were in individual cell-like classrooms, all were mutually well acquainted. I found that this was not so. I did not realize the extent of teacher isolation. Not only were the teachers not having professional conversation; it seemed that

personal conversation beyond their grade levels was also severely limited.

Faye was appreciative of the camaraderie. She said:

I like coming also because I do like to socialize (laugh) and I like all of you. I do enjoy this SG because we get to talk about concerns and issues relating to our students and education.

Similarly, Kaitlin wrote in her journal:

I like the setting we're in whenever we meet. The social interaction and opportunity to bond and build trust make for healthy discussions.

I *monku monku* (Japanese for complain) all the time about having to write and having to read the articles, but because I have to do it, I think there's a payoff. When I finally get myself to do it, it helps me sort all this mess up a little bit better, and you know, there's plenty more mess I have to sort through...If it weren't for this group, I wouldn't do this kind of professional development kind of reading. We're so busy doing the reading for the next day, writing the anecdotes for records on our kids and don't stop to think and write for ourselves.

Kaitlin was conscientiously juggling many roles and struggling to find time for all of them. What she seemed to be echoing, however, was Sarason's (1990) exhortation to ensure the growth of children by first attending to the growth of teachers.

An avid golfer, Trudy had a struggle giving up time for the monthly study group sessions. In an interview, she said:



The greatest hang-up was giving up time for the Saturday study group sessions. But whenever we did have the sessions, being there was pretty great...I really enjoyed it...I mean it was really satisfying...It was a real pleasant and satisfying experience...meeting with the others...a lot of social interaction...I get personal satisfaction and really feel like...it's for me, it's professional growth.

You know, actually there's so much reading outside, so much literature, so much research going on in the educational field that even if I pick up something and I read it, I don't have time to interact or react with anybody...with the study group I like getting different opinions or ideas or views from other people because sometimes it kind of just reinforces what I'm thinking and it makes me really feel good. If there's an oppositional view, I think, oh yeah, maybe, and that comes into play. It starts me rethinking my thoughts and I think through this kind of interaction and articulation, I'm growing as a person.

Trudy, a veteran teacher with unbounded energy, was open to learning. Her learning process applies Vygotsky's (1978) theory of intersubjectivity. It is through semiotic mediation, or talk, with others, that her ideas get reformulated or solidified.

Faye echoed the professional growth for herself as a learner:

The study group was really valuable because I knew you folks as staff – we never got to know each other's personality. Got to know each of you a bit better – that was positive. Another thing is I'm a mid career, beginning mid teacher – there's so much I need to learn – good for me to hear from

experienced teachers...advice you give me I take to heart - thank you for helping me learn more.

Wanda, a beginning teacher and the representative for her mom, did not have a group to facilitate. Because she valued the process, however, she volunteered to start a group with other beginning teachers across the grade levels at our school. She did get started and was able to hold a few sessions.

A strong supporter and believer in the process of the teacher, Rita declared:

I really, really buy collaboration. I really feel that the hope of education is in groups like this....From the first day of teaching I saw my classroom as my laboratory and I saw myself as a scientist so whenever a child didn't get something I was going to find out why he didn't get it and what I could do to help him get it....The pivotal points of my career have always been through groups like this...when I was discussing professional things and I really grew as a human being and as a professional....the classroom was the loneliest place...Dialogue helps to crystallize all my thoughts...it helps me to have a reason why I do every single thing at the conscious level, not at the unconscious level. It forces everything to the surface. I see the power in a group like this...The value...in just collaboration or just talking about issues is empowering your own brain and that's what you need in the classroom so it helps as a teacher.

"Dialogue helps to crystallize all my thoughts" was a beautiful insight. Rita's ability to bring things to the conscious level is analogous to Vygotsky's (1978) making the process visible through the interpersonal and intrapersonal processes.

This process is also part of Brookfield's (1995) critical reflection in which an individual questions and examines one's thoughts and assumptions – a requirement for a thinking, growing teacher.

The influence of the study group on teacher socialization and professional growth was positive. Participants shared who they were as persons, as well as professionals. They began to recognize the reality of dilemmas in education – dilemmas which were probably not going to be resolved by any “expert” somewhere, but more likely by their own inquiries, support of each other, and work with their children. They began to see “talk” as a valuable tool for their own learning and thus also a valuable tool for the children in their classrooms. In spite of the monthly meetings being held on Saturday mornings at local restaurants and in spite of the demands on their personal time, the teachers were drawn to the meetings by the camaraderie and socialization, which energized them. The intersubjectivity with each other and the educational literature fed a hunger bred by isolation.

#### *Learning from Each Other - Question-asking*

Sarason (1990) expressed his amazement that educational reform had not addressed question-asking behavior in the classroom. Question asking, he contended, not only reflects curiosity, but also gives rise to active and responsible learning. He noted that in a forty-minute social studies class, a teacher might ask 40 to 150 questions, but the whole class averages only about two questions. Children who pursue answers for themselves assume responsibility for their learning.

Marian, Wanda's mom who joined us the second year, shared her

experience with the strategy of having students generate questions. A caring, veteran teacher, she found this strategy a welcomed and exciting one. Marian first recorded in her journal an idea Rita had shared:

Rita shared an excellent strategy at Wednesday's faculty meeting on how to get our students to be more self-motivated, responsible, and directed in developing mature reading strategies. I can see where the students would be more motivated to read and comprehend materials when they start doing a lot of questioning and responding by themselves, rather than a teacher asking all the questions - neat idea!

At one of the later study group sessions, Marian shared her excitement about what happened in her experience with that idea:

Yeah, because you know the strategy that Rita (another participant sitting at the meeting) shared. I tried it. The kids loved it. I do it in social studies. They're really into it. "What questions do you have? What comments do you have?" At first it was strange to them because they never practiced it before. But when they started doing it, they really got into it. They saw me doing it as I tutored a student at 7 in the morning. "Oh, that's what you're doing with him with his book." Yes, it's teaching them to ask questions and how to ask questions, and they liked it! They do get more interested into the material!

Marian's successful experimentation achieved what Eisner (1991) points out as one of the main aims of school - to help children formulate questions.

Formulating questions gives rise to intellectual autonomy and problem solving.

This strategy is not easily evaluated, but that should not limit our nurturing of independent learners.

Marian's experience exemplified using teachers' knowledge, skills, and experiences as assets, of seeing learning as a continuing process in a teacher's career, and moving from dependence upon external expertise to valuing teacher experience. This reconception of professional development has gained more attention even though the studies are still too few (Dilworth & Imig, 1995).

#### Summary of Theme 1

The influence of the study group on the participants as adult learners was quite evident. The study group was participatory and flowed from teacher input. It applied the principles of adult learning and in the process showed great promise for professional development (Clair, 1998).

As adult learners, the participants recognized themselves as a rich resource, sought to make sense of educational issues, and saw learning in a continuous cycle of change Merriam and Caffarella (1999). The participants were definitely involved as learners. They exhibited Cranton's transformational learning characteristics of being self-directed, practical, and participatory.

#### Theme 2: The Complexities of Professional Development

The complexities of professional development within a school culture are numerous. Traditionally, one-shot workshops, top-down inservicing, and "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves, 1994) – the outward appearance of consensus, but the inward detachment and apathy toward decisions in which stakeholders have not been an active part – have been the cultural practice of schools.

According to Sarason (1990) school reforms have failed and turned out to be more of the same because they derive from the mistaken premise that the mission of the school is for students. He contends that the mission of the school must coequally be for the growth and development of both students and teachers. Conditions conducive to learning must exist for both students and teachers. "Whatever factors, variables, and ambience are conducive for the growth, development, and self-regard of a school's staff are precisely those that are crucial to obtaining the same consequences for students in a classroom" (Sarason, 1990, p. 145). He warns that this is an idea not easily accepted by the public. Although there may be apparent agreement that schools also exist for the growth of teachers, the hard reality is that few are ready for the concept to be a reality.

My motivation for doing this study was to take this concept of teacher professional growth one step closer to reality. That one step, however, met with many dilemmas. Providing talk time for teachers as a form of professional development raised as many questions as it answered.

### *Time Dilemma*

Finding the time for professional growth within the school bell schedule was extremely difficult and a major dilemma. With the various pullouts and resource services, the school day in the elementary school is full, but fragmented. Finding a common time for teachers of one grade level to meet is near impossible.

I had no idea how time for teachers could ever become a reality. When the school unexpectedly received an additional position, we were able to use the monies from it to hire five music teachers to provide for articulation, or professional "talk" time, for the entire staff. The availability of

the five music teachers was a breakthrough in providing professional “talk” time for all the teachers in the school. Because the elementary school day is already so fragmented with all kinds of special services (e.g. English as a second language, speech therapy, special education, computer, gifted and talented, physical education, Hawaiiana, library, Dare Program), however, it was extremely difficult to figure out time schedules for every grade level. Articulation times at each grade level would occur about three times a month at which time the five music teachers would relieve the whole grade level.

What helped us move forward were the tireless efforts of teachers who took it upon themselves to think through all the intricacies and complexities of the schedule. Those who helped to work out the details included my study group participants, Rita, Julia, and Marian. We worked over the telephone at nights and at school on weekends. School had started, and the pressure was on to work out a complex schedule for a staff of about 48 teachers. Working out the schedule involved a lot of negotiation, and working through many tensions within the faculty.

Different grade levels had different schedules so that some had other resources back to back with music to give them one hour and a half of uninterrupted time. One grade level was successful in scheduling all resources together to free them for the whole afternoon. Classroom teachers like to reserve the morning block for core instructional programs like language arts and math. Rettig (1995) supports the classroom teachers because he advocates basing scheduling decisions around the core instructional program. The scheduling of

resources, however, is usually difficult because the resource specialists need to fit all the classes within both the morning and afternoon blocks of the day.

Not all in the faculty were happy with the variations. Some in the larger faculty felt the curriculum was being weakened by their leaving class. Hargreaves (1992) raised the same issue of teaching quality as preparation time draws teachers away from their classes. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Some wondered why there had to be scheduled times to talk. Others felt the time was too short; still others thought it was excessive for teachers to have so much time to themselves. All were willing, however, to work with the schedule for that year and realized what a godsend it was to have five music teachers at the school. Since additional funding is not always available, the use of the five part-time music teachers was a temporary measure for this one year.

*A question, which arose out of this temporary measure, was: What other ways are there to provide time for teachers within the school day?*

#### *Facilitation Dilemmas*

Study group participants were helping to facilitate the articulation times at their respective grade levels. As in the Staff Development 2000 project (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001), they were both experiencing a study group for themselves and facing the challenges of facilitating one on their own. At the study group sessions, participants shared some of their beginning facilitation experiences.

Faye gave a mixed review:

Articulation time is good because the teachers do need the time to talk and come together and maybe talk about issues that can better our teaching,



but I agree with Myrtle, too...sometimes I feel like I'm missing something. I feel like I don't really know how to lead a study group.

Julia, who represented the resource specialists, expressed her uncertainties. This study group...I don't really know how to use it in our articulation group with our department. Maybe first what we need to do is find a common so called problem...or common kind of situation we have to resolve or a topic we have to talk about because one thing about resource is that everyone does his own thing...I still don't know what totally my responsibility is...hope that gets clarified a little bit more.

Annie expressed uncertainties, too:

As far as the study group goes, I like it. I think I'm getting something out of it. However, I was just realizing that when it comes to sharing with my grade level, I have not shared anything about the study group. I guess because partly we tend to run out of time. We have so many other things and I kind of forget and I'm not even sure what I am supposed to say or what we talked about because, you know, we talked about so many different things. There's not really one focus.

Focus was what some felt we were missing and something with which I struggled. It is only in the writing of this dissertation that I myself have gained a better perspective and reoriented my view of reality (Anderson et al., 1994). In the traditional form of professional development, there is generally a focus. As a resource teacher presenting at workshops, the district decided upon my topic. We resource teachers learned and presented to the schools the current trend in education, whether it be Madeline Hunter, facilitative leadership, or writing

strategies. As a transmission model, traditional professional development typically has a definite focus from the start.

With the study group, because the focus must be derived from the participants, there is no immediate focus. Short et al. (1998) found that it generally took a year before groups decided upon a focus. The first year included a range of topics and helped participants to build shared understandings. Those (at the grade level articulation times) who did not understand this complained about not getting results. In Clair's (1998) English as a Second Language research, some of her participants at first balked at discussion and just wanted knowledge to be transmitted to them. Beatty (1999) just held five monthly sessions and covered at least as many topics. His purpose, as was mine, was to instill the idea of teachers as self-directed learners and to explore the use of the study group as an alternate form of professional development.

Short et al. (1998) calls for both theory and practice - beliefs and activities - the why and the how - to be part of the discussion in order to sustain the groups. She also calls for sessions in which participants reflect upon the group itself. She views study groups as one important part of the overall professional development, not the panacea for all needs.

Although participants were actively engaged in the teacher study group, they found it a challenge at first to create a flow of conversation and to find a group focus within the grade level articulation groups. Short et al. acknowledges that not having been accustomed to reflection, teachers will need time to see its value. Grade level groups were diverse, and the ease with which they bonded seemed to depend upon the length and strength of their personal relationships.

The facilitation question being asked seemed to be how to create bonding and focus with a diverse group such as a grade level. Short's (1998), Beatty's (1999), and Jenlink and Kinnucan-Welsch's (2001) groups had all been combining teachers who volunteered from different schools. Our grade level groups were pre-set and not voluntary; the members were not necessarily interested in the same curriculum problems. The organization by grade levels could conceivably have been replaced by cross-grade level teachers. At that time, however, the teachers felt grade level groups would make them feel the most comfortable and "safe."

*Were we creating a problem by making the grade level groups the articulation groups?*

#### *Faculty Buy-in Dilemma*

Study group participants shared the need for the rest of the school faculty to understand the study group process. A critical concern to the group was how some in the faculty seemed to perceive this study group. There was a general feeling that the rest of the faculty needed to have a shared understanding about our teacher study group. At the one session in which I was away on an emergency, the members had the following concerns:

- It's hard to tell them. (explain what a study group is)
- They need feedback...this is not play, but professional development.
- Someone brought up the money. (Stipends to participants.)
- Nobody wanted to go. Money is okay, but not our purpose. We see this as valuable.
- Yeah, it wasn't the money.
- I joked about how long the waiting list was.
- We didn't expect the money.
- Some want to know where the money is from...has to come from the school. There were questions about procedure.
- Hazel presented it well and explained the purpose of articulation.

There is the study group connection. She presented it.

- Yeah, but it was only at the Grade Level Chairs meeting.
- Yeah, some said this is using the money for her Ph.D.
- But she explained it.

I was surprised by the feedback received from some of the faculty members. At faculty meetings I had talked about the study group and made the connection to their articulation time - a time to talk about instructional practices and issues. In my informal conversations with teachers, I thought most were positive. As was pointed out, however, the clearest explanation was probably presented at the Grade Level Chairs meeting.

The result was a decision by my study group to make a video collage of what happens during study group sessions. Julia would do the media portion, and I would supply the written blurbs, as well as show the video to the faculty. Participants would extemporaneously share their experiences.

The study group amazed me with their decision to present themselves in a videotape for the faculty. I for one don't like seeing myself on video. They were sincerely interested in gaining the understanding and buy-in of professional conversation for the whole faculty.

Response from the faculty to the completed video was very positive. All SG participants spoke as well and helped to answer questions. This was a high point of teachers sharing with teachers another form of professional development. It was important to expand the faculty's understanding of a study group.

If we failed to do so, we would be what Murphy and Lick (1998) identified as a stand-alone, or independent study group. The goal was to create study groups throughout the faculty.

*A question here is how can we best ensure grassroots support and understanding for the study group process?*

#### *Use of Time Dilemma*

Participants shared that the articulation times at their grade levels varied. Some grade levels were not leaving the room because they needed to assist the resource teachers. Some had a 90-minute period only once a month.

One said this time was used more for operational things at their grade level in view of the need for time to help the new teachers aboard. The more veteran teachers on the grade level were helping with “basic things...what to teach this week, next month, how to do paper work.” There seemed to be a tug and pull on one hand, getting the younger members to handle the details of teaching, and on the other hand, a resistance to having a good attitude about the less desirable housekeeping tasks.

Some in the group felt basic operations a legitimate use of the articulation time, as we seemed to have an especially large number of new staff members. Others felt strongly that articulation time needed to be focused on serious educational issues. I noted that hopefully, perhaps after a year, articulation time would be used to take in broader issues. The tug and pull continued, however, and the amount of open discussion on instructional practices alone varied greatly among grade levels. A positive outcome was more general communication among the teachers on each grade level.

Hargreaves (1992) reflects the struggle teachers have with time as the intensification of their responsibilities increases.

I encouraged the study group to use the summary of Routman’s book,

*Literacy at the Crossroads*, on educational issues to stimulate conversation in their grade levels, as it had in one of our study group sessions. The book suggests many current issues. I also introduced it to the entire faculty; only one teacher asked to borrow it. I think the lack of response was an indication of the pressures of time and responsibilities teachers had. As I mentioned in the beginning, the prevailing harriedness of teachers had prevented me from going into too much detail about the study group. Teachers are generally hesitant to add one more thing to their load of responsibilities.

The use of time would be an ongoing question. The articulation time was a time initially provided for professional growth, for a focus on instructional practices and issues upon which participants decided. However, when operational duties and pressing issues overtook school life, teachers were hard pressed to sort through their priorities. Furthermore, one cannot mandate reflection. For administration to dictate any specific topics would destroy the very premise upon which the time was provided - time for teachers to generate their own questions, learn together, and share with each other.

Short et al. (1998) cautioned: "One way to ensure the failure of a study group is to mandate attendance or to establish the group as a place where participants feel forced to change their teaching" (p. 109). She emphasized that topics should be derived from teachers, not the bureaucracy above, and should be of essence to the teachers themselves. Wenger in his work with communities of practice and situated learning proposes that learning must occur naturally and that the best way to get results is to leave workers alone to promote their own growth (Stamps, 1997). The question here is

how to focus the articulation, or talk times on instructional practices and issues from the inside out within the teacher circle.

### *Continuation Dilemma*

Our teacher study group had met monthly for a year. During that time we had shared personal stories, discussed educational issues that participants suggested, and read educational literature. The literature had included information on study groups, importance of teachers, educational issues, and facilitation. When we were approaching the end of the school year, we discussed what direction to take for the following year. I was retiring at the end of the year and asked the group what direction they wanted to take.

Responses:

Trudy: I see us continuing. I had benefits, especially readings. We jigsawed the readings, share ideas...kept me focused on what I should be doing.

Kaitlin: What we did here filtered down to our grade level. We spent time talking about curriculum more than in any other year. The time for articulation was the key.

Myrtle: I learned a lot as I wrote in my journal.

I liked the group. I would continue.

Wanda: My group of beginning teachers came together once in third quarter...three of us... some of us not as enthusiastic...we shared information, bounced off ideas.

Rita: I really believe in collaborative groups...answer is there...we're so busy...unless there's external motivation making us meet, we won't do it on

own...so busy...I feel without some kind of external leadership for one more year or whatever...until that happens...even if our intentions are good, we probably won't meet.

Julia: What's hard is that we really haven't had a common goal.

Trudy: Got to have need and time for study group to fly. Has to be a need. I wrote it in my journal.

Rita: One basic need is to reflect, to share...turmoil...I think, Hazel, when you ask faculty at meetings to "take everything off your shelf" (clearing your mind by making a statement or two of what's on your mind at the moment)...take everything off...I think 50% of meeting has to be sharing anything...will hit need to reflect...common need. Issue may not be the same. The connection is important, e.g. had this problem...got it lifted.

Trudy: That's happening in articulation.

Rita: Bonding is so important. We need to acknowledge differences and slowly evolve.

Faye: That 's exactly how I feel -SG was really valuable. because I knew you folks as staff - we never got to know each other's personality. Got to know each of you a bit better - that was positive. Another thing is I'm a mid career, beginning mid teacher - there's so much I need to learn - good for me to hear from experienced teachers...advice you give me I take to heart - thank you for helping me learn more.

Faye's appreciation of the veteran teachers and their expertise is one of the most important purposes for learning communities. A mix of levels of expertise provides greater learning experiences. (Lave and Wenger, 1991 as cited in Pugach,



1999).

Trudy: Actually, we learn a lot from you because you're right in the middle. Yeah, that's the best - the sharing

We learn from the younger staff, too. To me when we had Student Teachers, I learned so much from them and they were MUCH younger, I just enjoyed and learned so much - picked up ideas from them.

Kaitlin: When you sit down and have to talk about why you do what you do, that's the reflecting part. That's when we got to learn the most.

When I asked about Tobie, Julia said: "You know, when you see him in class, he is very different. He has high-level, thought-provoking lessons."

Trudy joined in, "Yeah, even when he was a Cooperating Teacher, we would talk about the lesson."

I concluded this part of the conversation with the following:

I think the group really grew...from the transcriptions, I can tell - in being reflective and seeing the value of sharing. When we're discussing something, not like we needed something from outside to help us learn what we did - we learned it from each other. And it was just the beginning...what I feel this group as starting is being like a leadership group - you're going to your grade level and you're going to practice some of the stuff. Because you've experienced some of it, you can share with them and have them start. And every grade level will have its own focus.

We need to have teachers talk to each other and break down the wall. For this group, it's been getting to know what a study group is,

getting to value the discussions, seeing what can happen when we share and do the same at our grade levels.

Because I was retiring within a month, we needed to decide upon future direction. Participants talked about when and where they should meet the following year. The possibility of spreading the participation was also brought up. For the content of future meetings, Rita suggested I continue to share professional readings, that the group continue to share pressing problems, that the agenda be spontaneous, and that I have ready suggested topics as well.

The first year ended on a hopeful note. Most of the meetings had been on a high, with participants enthusiastic and actively engaged in conversation pertinent to instructional practices. Participants had experienced a sharing of ideas, a raising of educational issues, a taste of the research literature, an exchange of opinions, and the opportunity of creating such an experience in their respective grade levels or departments.

Although I had suggested topics for their grade level groups, we ourselves, however, had not dwelt on any one topic. I was reluctant to do that because I wanted to be careful not to create an elitist group that would be seen as separate from the rest of the faculty. I wanted the participants to focus on topics within their grade level groups and support them in those efforts.

I was retiring that year and thought perhaps they could continue to meet on their own as a facilitative group to give support to each other. The group, however, asked that I continue to meet with them for another year. They felt that unless an external person scheduled and facilitated the meetings, they probably would not meet.

Interested in the progress of the study group, as well as the grade level groups, I agreed to do so. In retrospect, was this a mistake on my part? Was I extending the scaffolding period too long? Had I scaffolded enough? At this point should I have insisted they rotate the facilitator's role in the second year as we learn by doing?

Dilemmas the first year included finding ways to find time for teachers within the school day without sacrificing quality instruction, facilitating without dictating, ensuring grassroots support for the support of the grassroots, and finding ways to stimulate teacher reflection from within the teacher ranks.

### Theme 3: Evolvment of School Change

The evolvment of school change is continuous and subject to change itself. I was retired during the second year of the teacher study group, 2000-2001, and found it harder to communicate: teachers did not respond to email communication; some were novices with electronic mail, others too busy. I think it was then that I began to be a partial outsider. No longer a daily part of the school life, I would have to be updated on happenings. I also would not have the same sense of the general school climate and the little things that fit into the bigger picture. The composition of this group also shifted a little. Marian joined the group as representative of her grade level who had previously not been represented. Her daughter Wanda was busy with coursework at the university, as well as fieldwork, so no longer was able to join us.

The climate of the school was different; the morale was down. One of the things very different was that there was no grade level articulation time. There was no money that year to hire back five music teachers. The absence of such

time severely limited the time teachers on the same grade level could work together and streamline communication. Attendance at the teacher study group was poor. Meetings were held at the end of professional days, but teachers still had competing responsibilities and special meetings to attend. When they did attend, it was difficult to get started. There were constant interruptions, e.g. phone calls, deadlines to meet. The reality and interruptions of school were very much like that described by the teacher Robyn (Gitlin et al., 1992) who attempted a study group among her peers at school. For that reason I did not like meeting at school, but the times were set up to avoid taking class time or personal time. In addition, meeting at school at those times would make it easier for the principal, whom the group felt comfortable inviting at this point, to attend.

#### *Disappointment*

Participants bemoaned the fact that they felt particularly harried without the grade level articulation time in which to meet.

Kaitlin especially expressed the loss she felt:

I was so disappointed that we had no articulation time this year. Last year our grade level bonded and got so far...we got involved in curriculum during articulation time. This year, after a few months, one teacher on our grade level asked what was wrong, something was missing...we weren't talking with each other...in addition we had a new teacher on board. We had bonded so well in the past...ready to move on. We stopped, however, to make the new teacher feel comfortable...she didn't know what we had done and why. We took it upon ourselves to have a mandatory lunch once a week to bond with her...made time, getting to know her personally.

Also expressing her disappointment, Rita read what she had written in her journal:

School structure does not lend itself to teacher collaboration. The structure forces isolation. The bell rings...each teacher is in a box, the classroom, and isolated with no adult contact till the bell rings again...If collaboration is to work, those in high places, and I mean at the very top, must see its merit, sincerely believe in it, and aggressively push for it to be an integral part of professional growth. They must believe in its long-term efficiency effectiveness and not be dismayed by short-term growing pains...school calendar must be built around collaboration.

At another point in time, Marian expanded on that thought.

Having attended many district consortiums, she said:

As much as we want to go to the top, we have to do what we can here. Too long to wait for the top. It could be that we should send other people, instead of the same ones to workshops...we should let others learn the value of collaboration...introduce more people into it. We need to build a broader base.

The principal, who had joined us in the second year, responded to that by saying, "I ask, but there are no takers."

Marian responded:

Other schools didn't ask. They told their grade level chairs to go. We know only three were assigned to go. However, some schools supported extra people to go...Not the same (to just hear about things second-hand)...have to go through process of being involved....Everyone is

busy...different needs at different times. Spread out the responsibilities...Few people don't have to be so bogged down.

The principal responded:

Comes down to personalities, too...Hazel's better at this (getting teachers to do things.) Maybe it's true, I should just say, "You will do it," but collaboration is trying to cooperate. I don't know about being a Taisho (Japanese for tyrant) and demanding you do this. There must be a happy medium.

Marian's solution was, "Push them a little. Otherwise they won't try. We kind of wasted this year with no contingency plan for the articulation time."

Although I understood Marian's impatience with getting all teachers equally committed to professional development, I also understood the principal's reluctance to compel teachers to participate in district-sponsored workshops. Fullan (1993) states that the "more an advocate is committed to a particular innovation the less likely he or she is to be effective in getting it implemented" (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 138-9 as cited in Fullan, 1993). He recognizes the great potential of teachers working collaboratively for professional growth, but cautions that we must be sensitive to the legitimacy of people's different priorities and different starting points. I recalled times when teachers had other legitimate priorities and could not be the representative for their grade levels. I also recalled the times in which participants were late because of family responsibilities. I also thought about Tobie, his personal struggles, and inability to continue with our study group. To have pushed any of them to participate would have created resistance to the idea. Fullan's caution can be compared to

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of ascertaining the point at which the learner's actual development is before progressing towards the potential development.

Marian went on to share about the district consortiums she had attended, the action research she had been involved in, and how we needed to do the same at the school level. At a different session, Marian elaborated on her experiences in the district consortiums:

But the thing is inservicing can't be a one-shot deal. It must be a continuing and ongoing support. Go try this. As in the district consortiums, teachers need to go back to the classroom to try the strategies, then come back to the staff meeting to compare results to discuss what worked and what didn't. What can we try next? Having a collaborative effort that way becomes a strong system.

The principal seemed to like the idea and asked, "You think we should build in the kind of sharing done at the consortiums every quarter?"

There grew a consensus that sharing from within the faculty would be a fruitful way to build leadership. Peers would be receptive and understand the clientele. The principal noted how within our school culture it was very difficult to get certain people to share. Participants suggested sharing by a group of perhaps three teachers for support. The principal was pleased with the idea of sharing by teachers.

### *Faculty Breakthrough*

Study group participants in bemoaning the absence of any articulation time that year had spent time brainstorming ways to find time. Rita worked hard with administration on a time schedule that would provide for teacher

articulation time on a weekly basis. She had made sure that the minutes for instruction met the teacher contractual requirements.

The principal supported the new schedule allowing for teacher articulation time and asked Julia to present the idea to the faculty, brainstorm it, and explain the rationale for such a time. After a vote within our faculty of about forty-eight teachers, only two voted no. All ideas on how to arrange for the time for teachers were listed on the board. The final agreement was to shorten nine recesses during the week to gain 45 minutes of the early release on Wednesday. In addition, teachers agreed that for Wednesday they would have a common preparation period in the afternoon, giving them a total of 90 minutes for professional conversation on Wednesday afternoons before the regular faculty meetings. Teachers, it seemed, were willing to give up their preparation time and parts of recesses to give weekly articulation time a try.

For students the changes included leaving school at 12:15 instead of 1:15 on Wednesdays. In addition they would have no 12:15-12:30 recess. Details still needed to be worked out for those children who usually stayed for the A+ After School program which did not commence until 1:15 p.m.

This was a momentous decision made by the school. The principal expressed her jubilation at the teachers' responses. Rita was gratified that teachers so willingly and generously gave up time from recesses and their preparation time to create a common articulation time for all. Everyone agreed that Julia had done an excellent job with the brainstorming session and had presented the rationale for the change well. Approval was also obtained through the School-Community Based Management process and negotiation with the



Parent Teacher Association.

*Faculty/Administration Fears*

Blasé and Blasé (2001) note that teachers are at times wary of empowerment. First, they may not trust the power given; it may be a ploy to involve them only in minimal and unimportant ways. Second, lack of resources and support discourage them. Administration may also be wary, fearing the loss of power. At the onset of this two-year study, the principal did have some reservations, openly noting that she was taking a risk other principals were not and that she had some fears of losing control.

I assured her and the faculty that if this alternate form of professional development would work anywhere, it would surely work at Green Valley Elementary where there was such commitment and dedication to the education of children.

Much later in an interview, the principal shared that she was okay with not attending the first year's sessions because she recognized that the teachers might open up more without her presence. She was also confident that I would not let the conversation deteriorate to just a gripe session.

After the faculty meeting at which teachers almost unanimously agreed to the change in the Wednesday schedule, the principal was elated and announced to the study group that she was totally "jazzed." She also was impressed by the insight with which the teachers analyzed the school's testing data. She expressed, however, how taken aback she was that some faculty members expressed worry that she would fill the teacher articulation time planned for the following year with her own agenda. "I wouldn't take away the articulation time. The nerve!"

she exclaimed.

Marian responded, “Think you just need to let them air it. You need to pull back. Just give reassurance.”

I noted that it was good that she had helped clear the air and suggested that now the staff needed to understand better what the articulation time was for.

Rita said, “That’s the next big challenge.”

### *Possibilities for Types of Study Groups*

Referring to Murphy and Lick’s (1998) book on *Total Faculty Study Group*, I prompted discussion on what kind of study group, or articulation time, we would like to promote within the school. Murphy and Lick’s total faculty study group, I noted, was a bit more structured than what we had experienced, but also contained aspects of what we had already done from a gut level. It affirmed some of the things that had happened in our sessions, e.g. teachers working together can build collegiality.

Murphy and Lick’s (1998) decision-making cycle for schoolwide change through whole-faculty study groups starts with collecting and analyzing student data, determining student needs, categorizing and prioritizing them, organizing groups around the student needs, having each group design and implement an action plan, having the faculty evaluate the impact of the actions plans on student performance. The cycle seems to follow the traditional cycle we proposed as resource teachers for school change. The difference, however, is in the organization of small teacher groups of four to six focused on specific school needs for student achievement. In comparison to other study groups in the literature, it is more focused on organizational, rather than individual, change

and seeks to work directly with changes in instructional skills and classroom behavior.

Its strength is direct application to the total school or district design; its weakness is that it lacks the involvement of personal interests and needs. In the total school's program of professional development, both kinds of organizational study groups are probably needed. The key to change, however, will be teacher voice and critical reflection to avoid prescribed lockstep activity. A skillful teacher "will always be an unformed, unfinished project and that teaching has elements of contradiction, complexity, and chaos" (Brookfield, 1995, p. 239).

The complexities of the adult learner, the process, and the context do not create a linear map for developing critically reflective teachers in a study group; neither do they guarantee transformational learning. They are, however, a framework which provides a path of possibilities for a peer learning community.

I noted how Murphy and Lick's (1998) book pinpoints the person who really makes it work as the principal. I emphasized that the study group was to help us be learners, just as several of them had testified in the video created and shown to the entire staff. I reiterated that both the principal and I had agreed that teachers would set up their own agenda. The time would not be for report cards and correcting papers although those were also important, but a time to discuss how to improve practices and instruction.

Hargreaves (1992) points out how teachers' work can be paradoxically intensified if time given to teachers is used for more administrative control instead of for teachers developing themselves.

### *Abrupt End – Teacher Strike*

The study group sessions ended abruptly that second year with a statewide teacher strike in April. In spite of that, however, the principal and the teachers followed through on their commitments to effect the change in the Wednesday time schedule for the following year, allowing for weekly articulation times for the whole school. I mention the strike because one of the unexpected results of the strike was a teacher having the time to get acquainted and talk. Although many teachers noted that happening, they did not necessarily realize that that connection with each other was something which should ideally be part of their normal professional lives.

### *Review of the Second Year*

At the start of the second year, the school climate had been dismal with no funding available for articulation time, heavier responsibilities for teachers, and only quarterly study group meetings. In spite of the dismal beginning, however, things brightened as teachers slavishly worked to resolve the time problem and won the almost unanimous agreement to have articulation times restored and made a regular part of the school week. In addition, the principal and the study group discussed new ways to strengthen the entire professional development program of the school.

### *Summary of the Evolvment of School Change*

The two-year study group experience was not without its struggles, but did exert influence over its participants, as well as the total school. The teachers study group responses to survey questions at the end of the two years give

further insight into the process.

Having really enjoyed the teacher study group experience, Trudy summarized her two-year experience:

Personally, I feel that if I had not been a part of this group, I would have missed out on the readings, concerns, sharings, views and a whole lot of other good stuff that helped me to grow professionally.

Being in a study group was exciting because of the people that were involved. It was a very comfortable, non-threatening group to be with. I had high respect for everyone participating and what they had to say was important to me. I felt comfortable enough to disagree at times and to defend my beliefs and ideas.

During the study group sessions it seemed as though the topics or issues were of mutual concern. The discussions flowed. Being that it was a group discussion and individuals with different experiences, personalities, knowledge, ideas shared, it was stimulating.

The study group either confirmed my beliefs as a teacher and reinforced my teaching style or provided me with new ideas to try or bring about changes in my classroom.

There is a real need and a place for study groups in the school today. Teachers need time to articulate because of the situations we are confronted with - special education demands, class size, standard-based curriculum, etc. We need to collaborate and work together to try to resolve these issues.

Kaitlin also reflected upon her two-year experience with the study group

and her grade level articulation group in her journal with the following entry:

At first, being in a study group forced me to move out of my comfort zone to do both, be a learner and be a giver of knowledge with teachers outside of my grade level. The professional conversations were stimulating and helped me to reflect on educational practices beyond grade level planning and curriculum development.

There was a feeling of empowerment--that teachers working collaboratively could make a difference in the educational process.

I asked her how her experience impacted her views on professional development. She responded:

I believe that when teachers are given the opportunity to have professional conversation regularly, the motivation for professional development arises spontaneously. Professional development does not need to be top-down. Administrators and state officials do not need to identify areas of need and then prescribe professional development workshops.

When teachers are given the opportunity to have professional conversation among themselves, they begin to generate a powerful problem-solving mechanism and determine for themselves, avenues to strengthen the successful development of classroom practices. This becomes a powerful professional development mechanism because professional development becomes internal.

Teachers recognize the need to learn and grow. They say, "I want to

learn more about..." rather than "I was told or asked to learn more about..."

Three major themes emerged from the study: the influence of the study group on teacher socialization and professional growth, the dilemmas of creating study groups within a school, and the impact of the study group on school change. Experiences both in the teacher study group and in their grade level articulation group helped participants to see themselves as learners, as well as leaders, shaping their own professional development. The dilemmas of creating study groups within a school included finding the time for teachers without sacrificing time for instruction, balancing the need for bonding with the need for focus, juggling experiencing a study group while concurrently facilitating one, and building ownership for one's own professional development. The study group impacted school change by creating a school week with built-in professional time for teachers and being more proactive about their professional growth. This group's focus coincided with Fullan's (1993) ideal of building a community of teacher learners from the ground up.

The teacher study group evolved from the interests of the participants, not from the bureaucracy as in the case of the Apex team (Nolan, 2000). It started with no specific agenda except that of professional growth, as did Short's et al. (1998) study groups. It was not as organizationally structured as Murphy and Lick's (1998) whole school study groups, but involved the whole school.

## V. INTERPRETATION

Whereas the previous description and analysis section made connections between what others said in the data, interpretation is the section in which I the researcher create knowledge based on the previous section. What does all this data mean? I am reminded of Wolcott's (1994) advice "to open things up rather than seal them up" (p. 260). Having had the extended time for reflection, which Wolcott suggests, for new perspectives, I raise many issues for further study.

The reality was that professional conversation was not a part of much of our workday for any of us – administrator or teacher. I hoped for professional conversation to become a reality among our staff, but I began this research not knowing whether or not such a reality would evolve.

Indeed it did evolve. Each meeting conveyed to me the commitment with which these teachers had entered teaching and the commitment with which they cared about student learning. I, as the facilitator, was also a co-learner. I learned much from these participants in this study group and developed an even deeper respect for classroom teachers.

Although not clear at first of why we were forming a teacher study group, participants grew in understanding and commitment to the concept of teachers as learners. Their willingness to go public and share their experiences in a video for the faculty was a pivotal point. Their interviews, surveys, and journals also attest to their insights into an alternative form of professional development.



Further work with school level study groups will need to explore the many questions this case study raises. The following are some of the issues not completely answered by this research.

#### Time

The teacher study group led the way in finding time for all teachers to have professional conversation, but the challenge of having enough time for everything remains. The end of the two-year study left many ongoing, unanswered questions. Will the teachers be able to help broaden the base as they wished and have more in the faculty be actively engaged as learners? Bombarded as they are with the call for standards and sanctions, will they find it too much of a luxury to reflect, to wonder, to inquire, to share personal experiences? As there is never enough time to fulfill all the duties of a classroom teacher, will the time, even though provided for professional talk, be used instead for more urgently felt, operational or mandated duties?

#### Location/Setting

Another question is that of setting or location of the study group sessions. The first year's meetings were an imposition on teachers' time and held on Saturday mornings. Therefore, the second year's meetings were accommodately held at school, usually at the end of a professional day, a day for teacher meetings with no children attending school. The interruptions were, however, constant with telephone calls, special meetings, and school deadlines for different activities.

The atmosphere of the settings in the two years contrasted sharply. In the relaxed, pleasant, and unhurried surroundings of a restaurant with greenery and

koi in the pond, it seemed to me personally that all of us just tended to have more positive, creative energies away from the school setting.

### The Organization of Groups

Yet another question this case study raises is the feasibility of having articulation times organized by grade levels. Although this set up was favored by many teachers because of the grade level's common concerns, the spirit of voluntary participation was lost. Furthermore, this way of grouping had the potential of teacher isolation by grade levels.

### Focus

Third, how and when a group decided upon a focus was a challenge we never completely met. Our teacher study group generated its own topics. I supported the group with educational research related to the discussions, related to the group process, and related to this kind of professional development. However, we never got to an in-depth focus of any one of the educational issues raised. The second year's focus was on finding ways to create time for teachers since funding for grade level articulation times was not available.

I was reluctant to dictate a focus topic to the group and wanted their grade level groups to collaborate on topics for focus. I felt issues could also be raised for study at faculty meetings or professional development days so that participation would be more inclusive. Ogata (2001) noted in her community of practice with parents that the group is the one that needed to set the pace and that she as facilitator found it best to follow the group's lead. It seems to be true that in order for the group to have ownership, experiencing the process is foremost.

### Balance of Power among Peers

Fourth, a fundamental purpose for a teacher study group is to raise the voices of teachers so that they can be heard equitably in the whole process of school reform. Within the teacher groups with diverse views and experiences, how does one keep the scales of power balanced among teachers themselves? And who will the “one” be? Timperley and Robinson (1998) caution how collegiality can work negatively and deter open debate. Fullan (2001) warns that things can be made worse if the concentration is on ineffective practices.

Even in the face of such possible missteps, we need to trust that teachers with power will act responsibly. Thus far, the power to construct knowledge and make decisions about instructional practices has not been in the hands of those who are most affected. Is it not time we take the necessary risk and entrust that power to classroom teachers?

### Administrative Power

Fifth, the question I did not have, but was asked of me, was what power I as an assistant principal had over the participants in the teacher study group. My first response was none. I felt that I had gone “native” and having been one for so long, fully identified with the plight of teachers. The telling question, however, was would I have been able to facilitate this group if I had been a teacher? The answer is definitely not. As a teacher I would not have ventured out with any innovative idea because I would have had more pressing, daily issues with students, parents, and administration.

So, what power did I hold over the participants in the study group as their facilitator and administrator? Though I felt pretty unconscious about it, I had positional power. As the assistant principal it was very natural and easy for me to ask for participants. As I helped to conduct faculty meetings, I had the opportunity to announce my initial idea of a study group before the whole faculty and ask for volunteers. When I approached individuals to represent their grade levels, I had a total of nine individuals committed to the study group. The principal, upon reflection, says she was confident that my rapport with the teachers would win me at least four to five participants. She was quite surprised, however, when I was able to round up a total of nine, one representing each grade level and department. I, of course, was just pleased.

Was it positional power? It probably was partly that – the assistant principal, as opposed to a colleague, doing the asking.

Was it influential power? Perhaps it was partly that, too, although I was not conscious of that either. You see, I never really thought of myself as an administrator, at least not in the way I had experienced administration as a teacher. Having been in the same grassroots position of the classroom and having sought to leave the confines of its constraints, I saw myself as a teacher advocate, not a superior.

Although reality tells me positional power and influential power must have definitely played a role in creating and sustaining this group, I like to think that it was also relational power. I related to the teachers as a fellow teacher and a fellow learner. It was my natural habit/duty to walk through our campus of about 850 students in the early morning, first recess, lunch recess, afternoon

recess, and after school as much as possible. In doing so, I quite naturally lived what I had once read about and had not understood – management by walking. Just through short greetings and visits, I got reminders about requests, got some messages clarified, some questions answered, some help for some task, some requests for help, little bits of information, some complaints, some compliments. Generally, I attended to the most urgent needs first, but got a lot of things done along the way as the right people appeared. With events happening so fast and furiously at times, I did not trust my memory and did what I could as immediately as possible.

From teacher comments I gather they appreciated my visibility, my frequent visits to their classrooms, and my consulting them about student discipline. Chambers (1997) similarly notes how in his principalship, his making the rounds around the school with a taperecorder (!) allowed him to respond to requests and made the staff feel valued. He notes that Sergiovanni (1994 as cited in Chambers) equated the best leaders with being the best servants. Ironically, my strength was in identifying with those whom I served. I say ironically because administrative training taught us to divorce ourselves from our past as teachers and to take an administrative stance.

Initially, my role as liaison between the teachers and the principal helped the teacher study group to evolve in a safety zone. Eventually, however, as the teachers and principal felt more comfortable about the process, my role was less essential. In fact I felt it essential for me to fade from the picture. For teachers to be totally involved in the process of professional development, they needed to be in direct contact with the principal. For the process to move forward, the

principal needed to be actively engaged in the group. One teacher had indicated that although she was grateful for my getting the process started, they wanted support “from the top.”

The principal provided resources in the form of stipends the first year, but was not a part of the group in the first year. She became actively engaged in the second year and personally asked Julia to brainstorm a change in schedule with the faculty. She felt it important that the proposal be presented from the grassroots and by a teacher, not as a directive coming topdown. She also worked with the teachers to get approval from the School-Community Based Management council and the Parent-Teacher Association for the change in time schedule for Wednesday articulation times.

Ericson and Marlow (1996) recognize the changing roles and power relationships between teachers and school administrators. They contend that both the empowerment of teachers and the authority of administrators are needed. They note the new conception of the administrator as a transformative leader who includes teachers in decision making. Ericson and Marlow (1996) stress the importance for power to be shared and not be the supplanting of an administrator’s power by multiple voices of teachers acting as the new topdown bureaucracy.

Sarason (1990) concluded that educational reform can only begin when there is a sharing of power between at least two different levels in the hierarchy. My research efforts helped to share power between school administration and the faculty.

### Some Words of Emphasis

The concept of teachers taking responsibility for their own professional development requires some words of emphasis. Sarason (1990) strongly believes that schools must nurture the growth of teachers, as well as students. He also indicates that the outcome of student performance must be measured by student interest and curiosity, not just test scores. For such an outcome to materialize, we must take the nurturing ingredients we want for students and first apply them to the teachers. We are mistaken and will be disillusioned if we make only student performance the mission of schools. "Whatever factors, variables, and ambience are conducive for the growth, development, and self-regard of a school's staff are precisely those that are crucial to obtaining the same consequences for students in a classroom" (Sarason, 1990, p. 152).

Anderson et al. (1994) cautions with a fear – the fear that practitioner involvement will "become one more teacher in-service scheme that can be packaged and taken on the road, another implementation strategy ...to 'build ownership' in schools for the latest centrally mandated reform" (Anderson et al., 1994, p. 7). Hargreaves (1994) echoes the same fear of professional development which is nothing more than contrived collegiality, an outward form which is both mandated and artificial and ultimately not beneficial.

Both administration and faculty need to be vigilant and discerning about safeguarding the environment for professional growth.

### Change as Ongoing

Change is ongoing. This research helped teachers to be more proactive in their own professional development. It opened the way to help break through the

barriers of time, isolation, and lack of reflection.

In the years following my two-year study, time continues to be an obstacle to contend with. To bring about greater unity and concerted efforts toward standards, teachers and the principal have now agreed to use two of the Wednesday articulation times for total faculty sharing, one for the district's Focus on Learning committees, and one for their own grade level.

As the teachers and principal experiment with different ways to improve instructional practices, different configurations of time for teachers will probably be created over the years. Hopefully, the one thing unchanged will be the teacher asking, as Kaitlin did, "I want to learn more about...." rather than "I was told or asked to learn more about..."

The coming together of teachers to talk about instructional practices is a powerful way to break their four-walled isolation cells. The ongoing challenge will be for teachers to break through walls of old assumptions and unquestioned traditions.

The lack of reflection has been alleviated a tiny crack. Within our study group we had the luxury of spontaneously reflecting upon our most immediate concerns. When reflection becomes channeled and directed within the framework of a school's planned professional development, the hope is that the time gained will be teacher-focused and directed, and not reflection within the constraints of someone else's assumptions.

#### Validity

Using Anderson's (1994) measures of validity, I submit the following:



1) Democratic validity - All stakeholders - teacher study group participants, general faculty, principal were included in the research and not done at the expense of others. All three eventually became one.

2) Outcome validity - To what extent was the problem resolved? The barriers of time, teacher isolation, and lack of reflection were lessened to some extent, and this success benefited all the teachers and the principal. Potentially, it will further benefit students and parents.

2) Process validity - Ongoing learning is occurring as the school reconfigures its professional development.

3) Catalytic validity - All participants, including the researcher, examine their perspective of reality. As we shared our stories, we saw the importance of each person in constructing knowledge together. We also saw the significance of some of our retelling and grew personally and professionally.

4) Dialogic validity - I did not have a devil's advocate, but the triangulation of data helped to affirm or disaffirm my findings.

#### Taste of Teacher Socialization

The lament for the lack of time during the school day for grade level articulation times during the second year seemed to have rallied the teachers and administration to work for a solution. The almost unanimous agreement to give up parts of the week's recess and to hold a common preparation time on Wednesday's was a pivotal decision in the school's history. The greatest contribution of the first year of this research may have been the inviting taste of teacher socialization and professional talk. That taste gave impetus to the desire

for more.

Critical reflection is only critical, according to Brookfield (1995), when it results in action. Thus, I would say that the kind of reflection the study group did for two years was critical reflection because it resulted in actions which would allow for a different landscape in professional development for the total faculty.

What converts this action to a critical incident is that this action was initiated by the teachers, and the power to carry it through was shared by both the teacher and administrative level.

### Conclusion

This two-year study found a teacher study group to be a viable form of professional development because it engaged teachers in professional conversation about the educational issues which they initiated. It also enriched their personal and professional lives with shared stories, construction of knowledge about educational issues, and introduction to current educational literature.

Participants acted as facilitators for their grade levels during articulation, or professional talk time during the first year.

When funding for the provision of such school wide articulation time was not available during the second year, teachers rallied to problem solve. Without sacrificing instructional time they created a time schedule which would allow for a common articulation time for the total faculty.

The wonder is that in spite of overwhelming responsibilities, teachers are very willing to acknowledge themselves as learners. The wonder is that there are educational issues they are intensely curious about without heavy mandates from

the bureaucracy. The wonder is that they can be proactive about their own professional development. The wonder is that shared power between administration and faculty happened. The wonder is that these altered states of mind will enable teachers to make positive changes in the classroom.

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